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OPERATION: SQUARE PEG

A Novel of Turbulent Tomorrow

By IRVING W. LANDE and
FRANK BELKNAP LONG

ARTHUR C. CLARKE
SAM MOSKOWITZ
ROBERT BLOCH



SATELLITE SCIENCE FICTION

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APRIL 1957

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VOL. 1, No. 4

A COMPLETE NOVEL

OPERATION: SQUARE PEG

by IRVING W. LANDE and
FRANK BELKNAP LONG

Francis Garvey felt unwanted—a social pariah with all hands raised against him. But Dr. Kerr had the courage to believe that even a human reject could help build a saner world on the frontiers of tomorrow.

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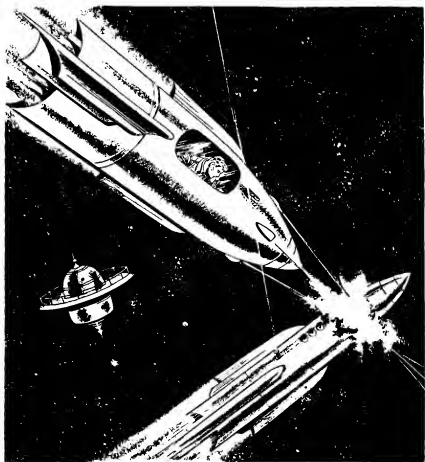
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Operation:



Square Peg

A COMPLETE SCIENCE FICTION NOVEL

The Enemy's secret weapon had turned Space into a deadly, pilot-destroying battleground. There had to be a counter weapon. . . . The problem was to find it!

by IRVING W. LANDE and
FRANK BELKNAP LONG

THE SHIP CAME in very fast, on the angular zig-zag course which was characteristic of autopilot homing. It flipped itself end to end, and backed up to the orbit station on a cushion of bright blue flame. The fires died abruptly, leaving an inert cylinder of dull metal drifting slowly away. Against the blackness of space the ship glowed with a pale but ominous glow, as though it had a

very real and vital life of its own.

To the watching men inside the station, the pale glow only confirmed what the mechanical abruptness of the ship's approach had already told them. They watched in grim fascination as the Decon squad went about its business—four men in bulky suits, floating after the craft like fireflies, as their leg rockets flashed rapidly on and off.

© 1957, by Irving W. Lande & Frank Belknap Long

Presently two space-suited bodies were brought back to the station, and the ship moved off to join three others a few hundred yards away, trailing along in a decontamination orbit, like tin cans tied to a dog's tail.

Throughout the station, heads bowed as the commander went outside to read the simple words of the spacemen's funeral service. He touched off the emergency rocket on each suit, saluting the dead men as they moved back and down, starting the long fall home. *Dust thou art, and to dust returneth . . .*

Back inside, the commander sat down wearily at the tiny desk beside his cot, opened the log book of the stricken ship, and thumbed through to the last page. He could almost feel the agony of foreknowledge touching his brain, penetrating its twin hemispheres like a white-hot needle. Another ship would become a pilotless coffin . . . and another . . . and another. He could only wait—and hope . . .

It was a miserable day outside, grey, with a biting damp wind whipping up the Charles. Dr. Alan Kerr pulled his collar tight as he walked over to the bridge. He tried the fast belt three times, and three times was driven back by the wind. Finally he retreated to the stroller, and rode the endless diagonal sweep across the river, glowering alternately at the ugly water below, and the gloomy out-

bound mass of tiny cars, cursing the weather and the politicians. The City Council had been arguing about enclosures for the walkalators when he had arrived in Boston nearly three years ago, and the debate was still going on.

By the time he got off the belt, it was raining—a cold slanting rain. He was grateful when he reached the ancient apartment house on Commonwealth Avenue, where Ann Fitzgerald shared a comfortable third-floor suite with two roommates.

Ann was assistant to the president of Propulsion Fuels Incorporated, a young sleeper of a firm, only six years old, and climbing past the forty million dollar a year mark. He had met her a year before, while she was taking her master's in business administration at Boston University. She had come up after his lecture on Unconscious Factors in Leadership to ask some penetrating questions, and had remained to join him for coffee, and to listen to an earnest monologue concerning his pet ideas on the real nature of the healing process in psychotherapy.

Since then, he'd been seeing her more and more often, pleased and somewhat surprised to find a girl who didn't get on his nerves—and vice versa—after two or three months. He'd gotten into the habit of spending Saturday evenings with her—either to go out to a show, or to sit in and talk.

Ann opened the door to his ring, with a bowing gesture like an Elizabethan page. "Hi darling. How are the test tubes today?"

He stepped inside, amused as always at the way the gleaming metal and glass of the PV towered by the fireplace, a strange interloper from the future in this comfortable old room.

Ann took his coat and kissed him lightly on the cheek. A rather slender girl she was, wearing the almost serious expression of a kindergarten teacher. Very light hair, and eyes deeply, incredibly blue. She was wearing a pale blue sweater and a skirt of some dark tweed, and she was the most welcome thing he'd seen all week. As he patted her on the shoulder, the fatigue of a long day with the Screeper, the frightening new problems, all faded away in the pleasure of touching her. They stood for a moment motionless, and looked unfocussed into each other's eyes.

Ann said: "I hope you're not reading my mind now."

He smiled. "Don't have to. All I have to do is read my own." He smiled at her affectionately, walked over and dropped to the sofa facing the massive fireplace. "Just let me look at you for a while, and forget my troubles."

"Okay darling." She found a bottle of Chianti and poured him a glass. He sipped and watched her as she brought things out from

the kitchenette, setting the table for dinner.

Gradually his tension eased away. By the time she announced dinner, he felt more like talking.

She took a sip of Chianti, and picked up the conversation as though there had been no pause. "What kind of troubles do you have today? Are they giving you beautiful female specimens to experiment on?"

He leaned forward, his face sobering. "That would really be trouble," he said. "We learned today we haven't been doing as well as we thought. There was a meeting at the lab this morning. A big one. Two admirals, a couple of cabinet secretaries, and enough Phi Beta keys to start a locksmith's shop.

"They informed us the Enemy pulled a new one out of their hats. It seems they've found a way to slow our crews down. There's been a frightening shift in our casualty figures in the last few months. Up to the beginning of April, we were getting five of their ships for every two or three we lost. We were sitting pretty—reasonably pretty, anyway, if you have to fight a war.

"Since then they've been cleaning house on us. They matched us almost exactly ship for ship, until last month. Then they started going ahead. Last week was really bad. We lost eight ships to get three. Pilot fatigue has been in-

creasing at the same rate as our losses. New pilots, right along with the old ones.

"And this morning, the navy finally got around to telling us about it. Naturally, we'd be the last ones they'd tell. When anything seems pretty ghastly to them—they keep it under wraps as long as possible."

Ann's levity had dropped away. "Do they know what's causing it?"

"That's what has them stumped. Our pilots are convinced they're better trained than the enemy. Our radar is two hundred miles better than theirs. Of course, their ships are a little lighter—they can stay out longer and travel a little farther on a mission. But in a fight, that hardly ever makes any difference. It can be written off as negligible."

"Could it be sabotage?" Ann asked. "Or maybe it's just a temporary change in the figures—tired pilots—tired ships?"

Alan shook his head emphatically. "That's what they hoped for a while. But this thing has gone beyond all possible chance of becoming explicable as just a temporary shift in the fortunes of war. The engineers have gone over the ships inch by inch. They've tested them as though they had just come off the drawing boards. And they swear the ships are as good as ever—better, in fact. The only real clue we have is in this note. They found it in the logbook of a ship

that came home on auto. The pilot was dead; navigator dying."

Alan reached into a jacket pocket and skimmed an envelope onto the table.

He stared sourly at the fireplace as Ann extracted a crumpled logbook page from the envelope. The aura of a soldier's death agony hung in the room as she read.

"We're dead. We got the bastard, but he broke in our direction and our bomb followed him. Got caught in the edge of the explosion—took a mess of radiation . . .

"Radio out, ship is on auto for orbit station. Hope you can clean it up and use it again. She's a good boat.

"Figure I have ten or fifteen minutes, and there's something I want to say. The Enemy has something that's making us look awful bad. Something that scares us. Noticed it in the last six or eight fights. The closer we got to them, the scarer I got. Different from the usual scared because it's a fight. Out of proportion somehow. First times I just felt gloomy, slow, uneager—figured I was just getting a bellyful. But each time it went deeper like it was adding up. Like sandpapering the skin off your fingers. Each time more scared—harder to keep mind on the fight. Not scared of fight—just scared, period.

"Ask other guys. They won't admit it unless you ask—ashamed

to admit scared but they know. Make 'em talk, they'll tell you...

"Tell Bill Wylie say goodbye to Susie for me. Tell her I'll—"

Ann folded the note almost tenderly, and placed it carefully in the envelope before she looked up. "What does it mean, Alan?"

"It means they're beating us at our own game. They're outgunning the Screep."

She frowned. "I don't understand. How can they get to a man on a spaceship equipped with a Screep?"

"That's what has us worried. Actually, it wouldn't be a Screep—just based on the same ideas, but a lot farther along. We've been worried about something like this, ever since they pulled most of the good Human Resources men off research, and dumped the budget into Screep training. But the way the battle scores were going, we had to keep quiet. Now we've been topped, and I think we're in for a nasty time."

Ann leaned over absently, to brush a stray lock off his forehead. "Well, as long as there isn't any real war, you'll have time to figure out what they're up to."

"That's just the point, Ann!" He slammed his fork down. "It *is* a real war! The only reason we haven't been fighting here on Earth is that we've been so evenly matched out there. Neither of us can set up a moon station because

the other would blow it to smithers. The minute the Enemy controls space, we'll be politely invited to join their fifteen-nation team—on *their* terms. And if they have the muscles to back up the invitation, we'll think very seriously of joining without firing a single bomb.

"This is very likely all the war there's going to be. Whoever wins it takes home all the marbles. Don't kid yourself that just because we all pretend nothing is happening out there, it doesn't count. This is for keeps. And the navy had to sit on the thing for four months before they decided maybe they ought to tell us about it!"

II

ALAN FINISHED HIS shrimp cocktail; toyed for a moment with his dinner, and got up. He began to walk around the room, hands in pockets, kicking idly at tufts in the rug.

"The answer's in the Screep somewhere. Somewhere there was a turn we missed." He was muttering almost to himself.

Ann glanced unhappily at the plate he had left, then watched him as he punched a fist into the palm of his left hand, scowling down into the fireplace.

"Would you like to tell me about the Screep?" she asked. "Perhaps it would help."

He shrugged. He knew she was cleared for top secret in her job, but for reasons he hadn't cared to explore, he had never felt like talking to her at any length about his work. He did tonight, however.

He shrugged again, and the irritation on his face faded to petulance.

"The thing started in seventy-two, when Sorokin stumbled onto the Resonator. Somebody set a lab rabbit down next to a screwy ultrasonic generator he'd rigged to run up and down the spectrum in an intricate pattern. Sorokin noticed that every once in a while the rabbit would cringe and whimper for a moment. When he noticed that the cringing came at regular intervals, he smelled something big. He went to work with humans—mostly himself.

"In a couple of years he established a wave pattern that stimulated fear, and in another year he had the emotional spectrum. Thinking was much too complicated—still is—but the basic emotions run in patterns that are reasonably constant.

"For a while we worked with just the Resonator—specially tuned, of course. The thing looked like a crazy cribbage board, with dozens of tiny vibrators stuck in it. We actually had a tuning knob with the names of emotions for positions, and a . . . 'volume control'. We found that we could do wonderful things in psycho-

therapy simply by using it to help hold a man in a problem.

"Then Sorokin and a couple of smart electroencephalographers came up with the big one—a machine that picked up emotion wave patterns directly from the brain and converted them into the corresponding ultrasonics. Theoretically, all it meant was that with a pair of these gadgets, the patient and therapist could transmit their emotions to each other—generate real empathy. And it worked. Psychotherapy got sharper, finer, and faster in every respect. Diagnosis began to mean something more than just cataloging what we didn't know.

"But something else happened, too. Gradually we learned—it's hard to explain—that we could do more than merely create a resonated emotion in the patient. We could actually feel where the bodies were buried. We could tell what the patient was unconsciously avoiding—and how to create an emotion—slightly different—that would sort of nudge him in the right direction. And with the therapist 'plugged in' as a kind of condenser, taking the overloads, the patient was able to tackle and reduce problems he couldn't have handled alone, no matter how sympathetic or wise the therapist might be. It was more like telepathy than the theory would account for."

Ann had stretched herself out

on the sofa while he talked, her chin resting in her palms, her eyes following him intently as he paced the carpet. "That was the Screeper?"

"That was the Screeper. The Sorokin Converter for the Reproduction of Emotional Energy Patterns. *Quite a gadget.*"

"It must have been tricky learning to use a thing like that," she said.

"We had our troubles," Alan said. "There was one time I was working with a patient who was supposed to be reasonably sound—a few anxieties—that sort of thing. I was just a student at the time. He was talking about some bully who had picked on him in the third grade, so I nudged him with a little fear. The next thing I knew, four of the other students were pulling him off my throat. It took all four of them. If I live a thousand years, I'll never forget the hammer blow of terror and hatred that hit me just before I blanked out."

"I suppose there were other incidents like that."

"There were others, some much worse, but that was the worst I ran into personally. It doesn't take much of that to make you careful."

"And then the navy took it over to train space crews?" Ann asked.

"Yup. It was obvious that the Screeper was the best method ever developed for selecting the most stable, alert, obedient men, or

men with other special qualities."

Alan began to kick the rug again. "So we became a branch of the Bureau of Human Resources—Screepers!" He bit the word out savagely. "And the basic research just about stopped. We trained space soldiers."

His pacing had taken him to the window, where he stood for a moment watching the treetops whip back and forth in the gathering darkness. When he turned back to the room he was calmer. "Of course, the best soldier isn't necessarily the sanest man. Obedience often conflicts with reason. But in combat, obedience can be survival. They have a saying: 'One poor decision well carried out is better than two good ones argued about.' So we worked out a compromise—so much aggressiveness, so much initiative, so much obedience. And a few other things. It isn't exact, but you'd be surprised at how close we can come."

Her legs flashed as she rolled over on her side, propped up on an elbow, and his eyes widened in appreciation.

"It seems like a very efficient system." She composed her skirt. "Is the Enemy doing it any better?"

"We have no idea, and that's why we're kicking ourselves in the butts. There just weren't enough men left over from the training program to keep pushing the original research. Of course

we've improved the Screeep, but it's still just a Screeep. The most tantalizing thing about this business is that it's so easy to be smug about what you know, because you don't know what you don't know.

"The whole Screeep program is based on what amounts to physical contact between the operator and trainee. Ultrasonics don't carry well in air anyway, but this isn't ordinary action at a distance. It's action across a hard vacuum at ranges of several hundred miles. The Enemy has somehow bypassed the ultrasonic wave pattern sequence that will directly stimulate an emotion. And they're using it to trigger disabling fear in our crews."

Alan chuckled. "It reminds me of a story they used to tell when I was a kid. About how telegraphy was the same as squeezing a dog's tail here and having him bark in Philadelphia; and radio was the same thing without the dog. That's what we're up against—the same thing without the dog."

She was frowning thoughtfully. "Haven't soldiers always been afraid?"

"Yes, but at a level they can overcome in taking action, and turn into anger. That's the real root of bravery. But this upsets the normal fear-action-bravery sequence. When a man is trying to act and he's still filled with fear, he loses coordination. His effec-

tive IQ drops to a small fraction, and he becomes unstable. Back in the early air wars, many crewmen jumped without parachutes from bombers that hadn't been scratched. Fear of dying, and uncertainty—the worst kind of fear—drove them to an illogical suicide. The last couple of minutes of a combat approach require every bit of intelligence and coordination a man possesses. The figures are showing what happens when these factors are reduced."

"But if this thing is electronic, how is it your problem? You're a psychologist."

He smiled. "It doesn't come in neat packages like that. Sure, the physicists and engineers are trying to duplicate the thing—if it is electronic—to fight it on its own level but we don't know how far we're behind. It could take anywhere from a month to years, to find the answers. And we haven't got years. At the present loss rates, we may not even have a year. And there's no guarantee it won't get worse."

The smile left his face. "Unless we can find something at our level—a drug perhaps—something we can do with the Screeep to prepare the trainees for . . . whatever it is. Or maybe a different type of trainee . . . stolid peasant types, maybe, or even some kind of psychotics . . . anything that will give them time to work. Otherwise we may never get the other

answers. The problem isn't just to catch up with the Enemy. We've got to find a way to control this thing, whatever it is, while we chase them."

He finished beside the sofa and sat down, drawing Ann down beside him and slipping one arm about her waist. "Well, maybe the death-ray boys can come up with some way of shielding the ships without fouling up the radar."

Slowly she freed herself and stood up. "It will wait till tomorrow. Let's finish dinner while it's still edible—I hope."

III

MORE OFTEN THAN not the brightest and the darkest strands of human destiny become intertwined simply because a man turns right instead of left on a crowded street, or buys an ill-fitting pair of glasses, or forgets to wind his watch on getting up in the morning. Coincidental threads—trivial in themselves—are caught up and quickly woven into a larger pattern which may loom through the mists of time as an Everest of human achievement or come to resemble the shadow which is to fall across a man on the day of his death.

At the very moment when Dr. Kerr was rejoicing in the warmth and sympathetic understanding of Ann Fitzgerald another young man—in another part of Boston

—was finishing his dinner under quite different circumstances.

The term 'young man' has very little value in pointing up a comparison and in this particular instance it should perhaps not be used at all. Certainly its use can be justified only in a very broad, generic sense, for Alan Kerr was a mature individual with a great deal of intellectual discernment and Francis Garvey was a teenage hoodlum who hardly seemed to merit the second half of the term.

'Young ape' would have perhaps more suitably described him—if modern psychiatry had been permitted to think in such terms. But fortunately there are stern restraints imposed on what psychiatrists may think, and the average, well-informed practitioner would have preferred to take a second look at what made Francis Garvey run.

By night and by day inside Garvey the jungle waged unceasing warfare. And since there was no censor, no psychological block, in Garvey's mind at all the struggle took place at all levels and frequently at the very perimeter of his consciousness.

Each encounter was waged with a savage cruelty and a savage cunning. But there could be no hope of eventual victory, because in such a mind the jungle wars only against itself. How could it be otherwise when every member

of a wolf pack is exposed to constant treachery from within, and there is no reason to choose one night-black thicket above the other, and survival becomes an end in itself?

Francis Garvey—the “Francis” was just one of a thousand cruel affronts inflicted upon him in his infancy—was a good-looking youth with neatly manicured fingernails and features which gave him at times a bland, almost ingratiating aspect. But those same features could become sullen without warning and turn even more quickly into a mask of sneering defiance.

In fact, his eyes—when you looked at them closely—were almost always the opposite of ingratiating. They were too probing and too dark, and though they might have been invaluable to a man in a prosecuting attorney’s role they were hardly an asset to Garvey.

“What’s troubling you, kid?” Nick Tabor asked, pushing back his plate and surveying the lunch-bus customers with amused tolerance. “If the way that waitress cold-shouldered you ain’t acceptable, why don’t you just grab her? Or haven’t you got a long enough reach?”

“Garve couldn’t do that,” Fred Wills said, with mock solemnity. “She ain’t good looking enough. Garve here is kind of particular.”

Wills was a smooth-looking

youth, too, with a round baby face that had lost all of its innocence on the day he’d discovered that his parents had no liking at all for the intricacies of child-rearing.

“I’m not particular,” Garvey said, his dark eyes downcast. “All dames look alike to me.”

“What does that mean? You like ’em ugly as well as good looking? Nick, you hear that? He wants to make love to a girl with no *charm*.”

“Quit needling me, will you? I didn’t say anything about making love. I don’t want to make love to them or have them make love to me. This love business is only a phony excuse, anyway.”

“Look who’s talking. I’ll bet the guy’s never even taken out a hunting license.”

“He’s got a license—haven’t you, Garve?”

“I told you to quit needling me!”

Suddenly the knife snapped open. Garvey had whipped it out so quickly that his companions were caught completely off-guard. Wills recoiled in alarm, his face whitening. Tabor just stared, but a tiny muscle in his jaw began to twitch spasmodically.

It was a big knife, with a white-plastic handle and a nine-inch blade. It was a push-button knife—and now it was open and ready.

It was Tabor who spoke first. “What’s wrong with you, kid? We know all about your dame

record. If it wasn't solid do you think we'd kid you about it. Freddy was talking out of turn. Ain't that so, Freddy."

"Sure it's so. I—I didn't mean a word of it."

"You meant it, all right. And I'll tell you what *I* meant. When I said I wasn't particular I meant—about easy dames. The hard-to-get ones I'm plenty particular about." Garvey snapped the knife shut and returned it to his trousers' pocket. "Okay, forget it."

Wills stared at him in relief. He seemed to be getting a little of his composure back. After a moment he leaned forward and whispered confidentially, "Those hard-to-get dames. Maybe we should do something about that. Is there any one dame in particular—"

"No one dame," Garvey said. "I told you to forget it."

It was something Garvey wanted to forget himself. He'd watched her come out of the Propulsion Fuels Building maybe a dozen times. He'd been on the corner watching after the first time, when he'd seen her come out by accident. There was something about her—

Alone in his room at night he kept remembering how her hips had swayed when she walked. It wasn't a 'put on' strut—not the easy-dame kind of grind at all. It was just an 'all woman' something that made a guy's pulses

pound and the blood mount to his temples.

Hell, why should he torture himself? There were plenty of other women just as desirable—and not all of them were so high above him either. He could reach right up into a Cadillac if he wanted to—

"Come on, let's go," Tabor said, rising abruptly from the long counter and giving Garvey's elbow a nudge. "Just talking about chicks ain't getting us nowhere. If you liked that waitress you could stay here and make progress. But you don't like to talk to her back. That I can understand."

"Where'll we go?" Wills asked. "Got anything in mind?"

"Haven't I always," Tabor said.

"But where—"

Tabor grinned.

"Well, there's a feelie-talkie playing at the New Lyceum to-night that should take our minds off the War. One of these days a recruiting sergeant's going to reach out and take us right off the hook. There'll be no chicks to worry about then. I read a book once about a guy who went to Venus and got tangled up with a green woman—green and as naked as a seal. He went walking with her on a beach, and the waves came in pretty like, and all of a sudden she wasn't fighting him off anymore."

"Sure, in a book. But there's no life on Venus or any of the plan-

ets. What a way for things to turn out."

"What did you expect? Aren't there enough dames for you right here on Earth? How about it, kid? Aren't there enough?"

"Too many," Garve said. "But that recruiting sergeant stuff is the bunk. They won't take me. I've got too many short raps chalked up against me. Add helicab stealing to shaking down bookies and making passes at dames who don't know when you're doing them a favor—"

"Sure, I get it. It adds up to a big rap. To one big rap. And they won't take a guy in the Space Force who'll contaminate every ugly son in a cootie-barracks by teachin' them how to put the squeeze on the hopped up brass. Me, I don't have to worry either. I got a blown-out right eardrum."

"That ain't what you just said," Wills protested. "About the recruiting sergeant taking us off the hook—"

"I was really thinking about you, Freddy. Garve here has an out—and so have I. But there's nothing to stop them from taking you. What's one short stretch on a reform farm? They'll take you and make a man out of you, kid. Can't you just picture yourself flyin' through space with the greatest of ease, with the Enemy getting angrier by the minute.

"First you lose your legs. You think, 'I can get along without

legs. Some dames aren't particular that way.' Then—pouf! Your arms go too. So you're a basket case. So what? You can still get around inside your head."

"Cut it out," Garvey said. "There's a lot of guys inside those big ships. The ship gets blown apart—you get blown apart with it. It all happens so fast you don't feel nothing. You don't just get your butt singed."

"I bet you'd be scared though," Wills said. "A few seconds before it happens—"

Garvey's eyes darkened.

"That's what you think. You're the quick-hollerin' kind. You should carry a can of preservative to put your guts in. Not too big a can—because then all you'd see would be a floating speck."

Wills' face flushed. "That's real crazy talk. If a punk kid said that to me I'd flatten him out. But you're supposed to be my pal—"

"You mentioned being scared. I just don't like to hear guys talk chicken, that's all."

"You don't want anybody to say what he thinks—is that it?"

"You didn't say *you'd* be scared. You said *I'd* be scared. When an idea like that pops into your head—keep it to yourself."

"Sure, Garve. I only—"

"Shut up! I ought to whack you on the can!"

"What you guys both need is something to cool you off," Tabor said. "That talkie-feelie I told you

about ought to do it. Laura La Rouche in 'Lisbon Express'."

"You mean 'heat us up', don't you?" Wills asked.

"I mean just what I said. You go in heated up and come out cool. That's because it's just about as good as the real thing."

"It's never as good," Garvey said.

"Come on, kid. When you're stretched out in a seat at the Lyceum with 'feelie' cuffs on your wrists you'll change your mind. You'll be holdin' Laura La Rouche in your arms, but she won't be any one special chick. She'll be all chicks rolled into one."

A half-hour later, Tabor's prediction proved true enough—as far as it went. Garvey was taking in what lay within the radius of the deep-view screen with his eyes while his other senses were being stimulated simultaneously. His face was flushed, his breathing fierce and abandoned and Laura La Rouche was tight in his arms.

But she wasn't really Laura La Rouche. She was every woman he'd ever hated and wanted to hurt. She was every woman he'd ever wanted to cheat and betray, crush and abandon. She was the hateful symbol of something deep within himself which enraged him so much that he could only gain release from his torment by crushing it. That something wasn't a woman at all. In fact, it wasn't even a *something*. It was the *lack*

of a something. It was a great, terrible emptiness—a repudiation and an emptiness—where a something should have been.

And the emptiness had so cheated him, had so outraged and hurt him, that he could only find the peace his inflamed mind craved by crushing it.

It was a terrible kind of peace, exacted at a terrible price. He was hurting himself too. He was like a wolf tugging to free its leg from a trap, with a convulsive wrenching of its entire body. He was hurting not only himself, but the whole world. But he wasn't afraid to hurt, hurt, hurt. Hurt and crush. He wasn't afraid. He didn't care.

He could remember how it had been the first time. He'd been too young to really understand, but not to feel. The hard, rough hand descending to smite him—on buttocks and thigh. The awful, spinning emptiness of the room, the cracked plaster on the wall, the terrible, accusing, rage-convulsed face of his father.

If his mother had picked him up then and comforted him the emptiness would have become less frightening and he might not have begun to hate at all.

But his mother had gone right up to his father and said: "Next time hit him harder. He's got to be taught a lesson. The ugly, ungrateful brat!"

He had not only wanted to kill his father then. He had hated his

mother for refusing him the smallest shred of comfort, for turning on him and screaming at him too. It would have been so easy for him to forgive his mother. But she had never given him a chance to forgive her. She had gone right on siding with his father, year after year.

Garvey's hands were around Laura La Rouche's throat now. It wasn't happening on the screen. He was punishing her in his own secret way, taking his time about it, pressing his fingers deeper and deeper into her windpipe.

He wasn't afraid to do it. No matter what Tabor might have thought—he wasn't chicken when it came to the showdown.

Suddenly his fingers relaxed their grip. Laura La Rouche was now so completely at his mercy that he could afford to be generous, almost kind in his treatment of her. He relaxed his grip and smiled at her. Then he slapped both of her cheeks hard with his balled up fists, and whispered warningly:

"Next time I'll go through with it. You hear what I say? Don't give me any of that soft stuff or there won't be a next time. You thought I'd make love to you, eh? Love—what a laugh! Did you think I'd fall for the kind of bait dames like you use to sucker guys?"

"Hell, what's got into you,

Garvey," Tabor said. "What are you whispering to yourself for? Sit still, can't you? I came here to enjoy the picture. You'd think you had a chicken by the neck, or something. Whoever heard of wringing a chicken's neck at a Laura La Rouche picture."

"Hey, you'll get us thrown out!" Wills whispered, almost pleadingly.

"It's not a chicken," Garvey said. "Just a chick. A chick who's getting what she deserves."

"What do you mean—what she deserves? Nothing's happened to her yet. She's got three guys crazy about her, which is a pretty good showing for any one dame. A pretty good showing!"

Garvey removed the 'feelie' cuffs from his wrists and straightened in his seat. "I've seen enough," he said. "I'm going outside for a smoke. If I don't come back in I'll meet you in front of the theater."

"Sure, go ahead. It's all right by me if you want to walk out on the juiciest part of the picture. It's coming along any minute now. She's going to settle for only one guy and concentrate on him. That's when a 'feelie' really pays off. Brother, I may be stuck here all night. I may want to see it over again."

"He means he wants to feel it over again," said Wills, with a quite unnecessarily Rabelaisian candor.

IV

GARVEY GOT UP without commenting and walked straight down the aisle and out of the theater into the neon-bright night.

Boston Common was ablaze with lights and there were big colored posters everywhere urging the citizenry to volunteer for the Space Force, and not wait to be drafted. There was a very large one directly opposite the theater and Garvey lit a cigarette and stood studying it for a moment with a triumphant smirk on his lips.

Upstairs, he told himself, there were a lot of saps right now being blasted to bits. It wasn't for him, and never would be for him. Let the other guy stick out his neck.

Garvey had read about seven books in his life. One of them he still remembered. It was by a writer many years dead—Ortel or Orwell or something like that—and it was about what the world was going to be like in about forty years.

Well, the forty years were up and it hadn't come out the way Orwell had predicted it would. There were supposed to be posters everywhere with a frowzy-faced guy in uniform staring out and underneath a warning which read: **BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU.**

Maybe that would have been

good. Maybe someone should be watching, checking up on people. You felt more secure that way. You just let go and let somebody else do all the worrying. *Big Brother is Watching You. Big Brother is Taking Care of You.*

All right. He, Garvey, didn't really want anyone watching him. But there were a hell of a lot of people who could bear watching. The cops, for instance—all of the cops. Get rid of the cops and just have one Big Guy watching. He'd need assistance, of course. But it wouldn't have to be the cops. Mister Big could use guys like Garvey himself—guys who wouldn't take any guff from anyone.

Hell, why not? It would feel good to be on top for a change instead of where he was. He wouldn't have to go around looking over his shoulder because Mr. Big would always be there backing him up. If anyone Special Assistant Garvey didn't like stepped out of line—*Wham!*

The cops were afraid to use their nightsticks when it came to a real showdown—especially against teen-agers. But he, Garvey, wouldn't be afraid. He'd even use his nightstick—no, it would be a steel-lined head-buster—against dames if they tried to sucker him. Not all dames—just the easy kind. The hard-to-get kind he'd handle in a different way.

Just a nod from him would send

them to prison for life. So naturally they'd do everything they could to please him and avoid a fate worse than death.

Why had Orwell made such a wrong guess? Writers were screwy—that was about all you could say about them. Why would anyone want to be a writer in the first place? Practically every day you read about writers starving to death. If a guy couldn't predict right maybe he deserved to starve.

What it boiled down to was this—the guys upstairs who were fighting the Enemy were saps, writers were saps, the big-mouths were saps—and just about the only sensible guys were guys like Francis Garvey.

But just try making the big-mouths see that. They were always talking about more playgrounds, more recreational facilities, keep the kids off the streets. Kid stuff. He'd never known the time when he couldn't look after himself. You didn't have to buzz in under the floor to get what you wanted. You could go right out and take it.

That was the trouble with a hunk of filth like Freddy Wills. He let himself be afraid. He turned chicken the instant he saw a knife with a big blade standing out straight.

You could only die once. It was important to be the first when you saw trouble shaping up—the first to whip out a knife. But say

you were a little slow, a little careless about that. You could still charge right into a knife and take it away from the other guy if you were angry enough.

Anger was the important thing. Resenting interference, staying mad.

You know what can happen if you fail, so you don't fail.

Posters on Boston Common—red and blue in the neon flare. *Enlist—Enlist—Enlist. Defend Your Right to Freedom.*

Three ships blasted down—five—fourteen. And high in the sky men are dying. Let your bomb go at a hundred miles—no closer—and get out at maximum acceleration. When the pip reaches center watch out. You haven't got all the time in the world, you know.

The Enemy thinks our space station is too close to the moon. Wouldn't you like to change their thinking, chum? Enlist—enlist now. Laura La Rouche is taking the express to Lisbon and you can go with her all the way. That's your privilege as a human being. But it might be better to go out into space right now. How about it, guy?

"You don't know what you missed, Garve!" said Tabor, so close to Garvey that he recoiled a step in instinctive resentment, hunching his shoulders and bending an arm to give himself more elbow room.

Tabor and Wills were well in

front of the other emerging patrons but the exit rush was on. Everyone seemed impatient to get out under the neon glare.

"I know what I missed," Garvey said. "Her pictures always end in just one way—with just one guy in trouble."

"She stayed stacked," Wills said. "You got to hand it to her when it comes to loving."

"He started making passes at the air just like you did," Tabor said. "I thought I'd have to chain him to his seat."

"What do we do now?" Wills asked. "Where do we go?"

"Look at him, Garve. He ain't satisfied. He holds Laura La Rouché in his arms and now he wants to do something else—for kicks."

"I thought of something," Garvey said. "But maybe you guys haven't got the nerve for it."

"What is it, Garve?"

"How would you like to lift a steel ingot white-hot out of a blast furnace and set it down over there on the Common?"

"You're kidding, Garve."

"Sure I'm kidding. But I've got another idea that's just as good. We take off in one of those recruiting trucks and we lift a chick that's just like an ingot. Then we set her down to cool off somewhere."

"That kind of a chick, eh? Why couldn't we just pick her up with a wolf call?"

"The ride will be for kicks. We've got to shanghai a truck and that won't be easy. You know what they got in some of those trucks? Not just amplifiers, not just recruiting posters. *They got regular spaceship installations.* Small ones—like relays that sound warning horns and close blast doors and start bells ringing. And maybe a little bomb that could go off accidentally—if we're not careful."

"A real bomb? You're kidding."

"No I'm not. I read about it in the tele-tabloids. They want to show the guys down here what it's like up there—give 'em a small sample of the real thing. So what do they do? They don't even take the stuffings out of some of those little bombs. They stand in back of the truck and show them to the guys on the Common. It's safe enough because those bombs don't go off without special equipment—detonators and things. It helps recruiting. The guys read about it in the tele-tabloids just like I did and they know it's a real bomb and that gets 'em all excited."

"They rush in and enlist."

"It figures," Tabor said.

"Sure it figures. But when we get inside that truck we may have to knock a couple of soldiers cold. And those same guards will have their hands on the relays, maybe. Or on the detonating wires or something. So what happens to *us*. The bomb goes off. It's just a lit-

tle bomb, but it goes off, and it takes half of the Common with it. It takes us with it. How do you like that?"

"I don't like it," Wills said. "I don't go for it, Garve. I let you talk, because I could see it was on your mind. But why do it? We don't have to blow ourselves up just because an idea sounds like it might be exciting."

Garvey stepped forward and grabbed Wills by his coat-lapels. He brought the lapels tight up around Wills' throat and tugged viciously at the slack. Wills began to choke. His tongue protruded and he got red in the face.

"Goin' chicken again, eh? Ask me pretty what would happen if you got spattered all over the Common. Ask me pretty and maybe I'll tell you. All right, I'll tell you anyway. There wouldn't be any loss to anybody—anywhere."

"Let him breathe, Garve," Tabor said. "What the hell! If a guy is born chicken he stays chicken and that's all there is to it."

"Yeah, but he's going into the truck first. You hear what I say, Freddy? You're going right into that truck with your yellow streak showing. You're goin' to say: 'I'm Freddy Wills, and I want to enlist and be a big brave hero. Don't look at me like that. I was born this way—I can't help it. Can't you guys do something for me? I know how you must feel, just looking at a worm like me. But you've got to

try to work out something that will give me a chance to be a hero.'"

Garvey released Wills and sent him spinning backwards against the 'feelie-talkie' animation poster on the opposite side of the entrance lobby. Wills collided with the poster and half-clung to it, a pleading desperation in his eyes. Suddenly he was sobbing. Great, convulsive sobs racked him as he clung to the poster.

Above his head Laura La Rouché walked across a terrace high above the Madeira Islands. It was a bright, clear morning and the sea between the islands was azure-blue and ageless and it stretched away into blue distances that made all human grief seem remote and unreal. It was a Homeric-legend sea, and no black war planes droned above it and it was dotted with tiny red and blue sails all moving in the same direction—toward the sunrise.

And it was easy to see that the terrace was designed only for casual dalliance and there was no reason to suspect that Laura La Rouché would say or do anything that would have to be stricken from the record by stern modern censors, because stern modern censors were conspicuous by their absence.

"You've hurt his feelings, Garve," Tabor said, chuckling softly as he stared. "Why did you have to do that?"

Garve went up to Wills and patted him on the shoulder. "You're breaking my heart," he said. "It looks like you're all in a dither. When do you think you'll be able to turn off the tears? Take your time. Don't tell me until you're sure. If you turn chicken a third time the knife is goin' to come right up out of my pocket fast. So just make sure, that's all. I hate to see a guy crawling along the pavement with a shiv in his guts, yelling for the cops."

"Let me alone," Wills sobbed. "Take your hands off me. If you try to pull anything—"

"It could happen right here. I know how to get away fast. Maybe that could be our kicks for the evening. Just say the word—"

Wills straightened, his face ashen. "All right," he choked. "I'll go through with it. Don't just press me, that's all."

Garvey turned and walked back to where Tabor was standing, a triumphant smirk on his face.

"All right," he said. "Now we steal a truck. Come on, let's get started."

Night breezes stirred the trees along Boston Common, women laughed and moved closer to their escorts, a jet plane drone overhead. And far away and long ago—a terrifying ten hours ago—the orbit station knew more mourning, knew more grief. The decontamination trail glowed bright against the blackness of space and the

commander whispered beside a flag-draped coffin:

"I hope they can do something about it. I know they'll keep on trying. Dr. Kerr's a good man—the right man for the job. I think he'll come up with the answer. Just give him time."

V

ALAN KERR SAT on the sofa in the living room, finishing his third cup of after-dinner coffee. The coffee was very strong and black, the evening still young and by rights he ought to have felt good.

He didn't—and it was only natural perhaps that he should have asked himself why he didn't.

"Ann?" he said.

"Yes, darling, what is it?"

"They say that only a physician can cure the ills of a man's body and only a woman the sickness of his mind. I wonder how much truth there is in that."

She looked at him strangely for a moment, then said: "Are you trying to tell me that you think you are mentally ill?"

"Not exactly," Alan said. "I imagine I could get by in any large company of reasonably well-adjusted men. What intolerable restraints society sometimes imposes on men and women whose one, overmastering desire is to live and think creatively. Quite unnecessary restraints—restraints designed to curb the jungle im-

pulses of a very low order of human intelligence."

Alan paused and took a slow sip at his coffee. "The point I really want to make," he continued, "is this. Society knows—or senses unconsciously—that the jungle isn't easy to curb. It knows that the jungle is largely dominated by a low order of intelligence. But it also knows that the jungle is hideously complex and dangerous. So what does society do? It imposes restraints to curb—hit-or-miss curbs—and some of them cripple or destroy human creativeness.

"Society has to impose curbs to function at all. That can be taken for granted. But the measure of a society's progress toward greatness is the degree of freedom and independent judgment it allows its best minds to exercise."

"I understand all that," Ann said. "At least—I think I do. What makes you so sure I'm not capable of understanding?"

"I didn't say that. You *are* capable. But you hold yourself under constraint when emotional out-going becomes imperative. You're afraid to come right out and say: 'Alan, you've had a tough day. Don't let it worry you. I'm right here to cushion the shock. Here are my hands—hold them. I'll run them through your hair if you like.'"

"But darling, I—"

"Wait a minute. Let me finish.

Daily I run head on into some of the curbs I've been talking about. I take a terrible pounding from the jungle. Take the whole problem of the Screeper. I have my own ideas about the Screeper and the men I'm working with have different ideas. Sometimes we agree but more often we disagree. And that's where the jungle starts coming out. That's when you encounter envy, hatred, malice and anger in everyone you meet. And in yourself. The jungle inside you starts fighting back. It takes and gives no quarter.

"Society, you see, just isn't wise enough yet to impose the right kind of curbs and permit the right kind of freedom to men who are fully aware that the exercise of freedom is always a risk, always a danger that can grow cobra-fangs overnight. But you have to be willing—and able—to take that risk. Otherwise we all really will go back into the jungle for keeps."

"I see," Ann said. "Just what is it you want me to do?"

"This," Alan said, getting slowly to his feet. He walked up to her and took her into his arms and kissed her very firmly on the lips.

For an instant her arms went around his shoulders and she responded to his ardor with all the impetuosity which he could have desired. She returned his first kiss long and lingeringly and then she kissed him five or six times very

rapidly on every part of his face in a wholly wonderful way.

Then she suddenly stopped kissing him. She seemed to regret letting herself go, and a look of embarrassment and self-reproach came into her eyes. She drew back from him, drew away, and said very quietly and firmly: "You shouldn't have done that, Alan. You took me by surprise and I'm afraid I behaved very foolishly."

Alan looked at her in consternation. "Foolishly? You behaved the way any normal woman would under the circumstances. I've never known any one who could cool off so fast. I mean, after being simply wonderful. That's what I've been trying to make you understand. You let yourself go and then almost instantly decide that you've done something very unwise. Why? It isn't natural for a woman to feel that way."

A slight flush crept up over her face and she looked at him almost angrily. "You're very sure of yourself, aren't you?"

"What do you mean?"

"You seem to know all about how a woman should feel when you kiss her. You must have kissed a great many women, Alan. You've let your success go to your head."

"Have I? I don't think so. Of course I've kissed a great many women. I've never known one to behave the way you do. I can't understand you at all. Do you like

to be kissed or don't you? If it gives you pleasure there's no reason in the world for you to draw back like that. If you're afraid of what it might lead to you're just being foolish. You don't have to be afraid. We're adult human beings—at least, I hope we are. I think I have a fair measure of control. I believe you have. You'd think I'd asked you to sleep with me."

"Alan!"

"I'm sorry if my candor shocks you. You shock very easily—and I'm sorry and I wish you didn't. You know damned well I want to marry you. How many times have I asked you? I've lost count, and I'm not too good at simple mathematics anyway. Even Einstein wasn't."

"Alan, I'd rather not talk about it. At least, not right now."

"I'm sorry," Alan said. "I didn't mean to upset you. But that quality of emotional out-going I've been talking about is very important to me in a woman. Not all men may feel that way. But I do. An unresponsive woman has nothing to give me. A woman can deeply love a man and remain unresponsive in a physical way. It's possible—theoretically, at least. To some men it may not matter too much. They may even prefer to do all the love making themselves."

"But to me—that's primitive. It just isn't mature. It may well

have been the pattern followed by our primitive ancestors for five hundred thousand years. Women were taken captive in war. They were not free and independent and didn't really have the right to make love. They were made love to. The captive bird, the hypnotized rabbit. Often the cruelly crushed bird or rabbit. And there's something in the male animal that finds a fierce pleasure in that, if he's primitive enough. And if a woman is sufficiently primitive she may find pleasure in it too.

"All right. Say that all men have a little of that primitiveness in them. Perhaps they should have a little of it, or they fail as lovers. But if it becomes a dominant impulse in love-making you sink to the level of the jungle again.

"It isn't the creative way. It doesn't enrich the human personality as it should be enriched by sex—by an out-going of love and tenderness on the part of both partners. It isn't enough just to make love. You have to feel that you are loved in return. It might be better to be loved in return by even a physically unresponsive woman than not to be loved at all.

"In fact, it would be better. Why do men make such complete romantic fools of themselves over just one woman? Often she doesn't begin to be as physically attractive as a dozen 'easy' girls

they could pick up at random. But what they are searching for is something very precious and unique—a deep capacity to love them in return.

"Even that can become morbid, almost an obsession. A man can make a complete fool of himself in an effort to please the woman, can cater to her slightest whim. You might be able to do that to me. I don't know, I'm not sure. But it's because I feel myself to be so vulnerable that I'm talking to you like this."

For a moment Ann didn't say anything at all. She just stood quietly staring at him, and there was a look on her face which he could not remember ever having seen before.

He suddenly realized that she was no longer angry, that in some wholly inexplicable way his words had dissolved at least one of the barriers between them, and drawn her closer to him. Even before she drew closer to him physically her sudden change of mood made itself felt like a tangible presence in the room—an aura of warmth and forgiveness radiating out from her.

She was coming toward him now and he sat very still, telling himself that he had only to wait for the forgiveness to become complete. He waited and almost before he knew what had happened she was lying snugly against

him on the sofa, her head cradled on his shoulder.

He knew that he could have kissed her then and she would not have drawn back. But he did not kiss her. Instead he took one of her hands and caressed it gently.

"You create too many problems for yourself, darling," she said. "Sometimes I think you're absolutely crazy to torment yourself the way you do—with your strange insistence on analyzing everything. You should live more from moment to moment. A moment like this, for instance, is very precious. Why must you look ahead so much—or back so much?"

"I don't know why," Alan said. "I guess I'm just made that way."

"Of course, the Screeper's terribly important to you. You don't like to see men die. You were torn apart, so you came here to tell me about it. You were bitter and angry. You felt helpless and alone. Don't you suppose I knew what you were going through?"

"I thought perhaps you did know. But I couldn't be sure. Do you mind if I talk a little more about it?"

"Of course not, darling. I shouldn't have interrupted you before. But the dinner was getting cold. When a woman has prepared a dinner for the man she loves and it doesn't turn out right she can be torn up too."

"Sure, I understand. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to—"

"Never mind that now, darling. Tell me more about the Screeper. It concerns me too. I know it's selfish of me, but I do want to stay alive—if only to go on loving you. If too many of our ships are shot down there won't be any more small white cottages, or plumbers' bills or cribs with babies in them or even a starling hopping about in the rain. There'll just be blood on shattered floors beneath dead men and women, and skeleton window frames."

"No" Alan said. "It will be more final than that. Like a figured bowl that has been sand-blasted inside and out. The figures will be gone and the bowl will shine with its own light. It takes a long time for radio-activity to die out."

"So we mustn't let that happen."

"We can't let it happen. I don't even want to think that it could happen."

"You say our ships aren't piloted by the right kind of men. Aren't men who are willing to die to enable the rest of us to go on living the right kind, Alan? Won't we win in the end just because there are such men in the world—a great many such men?"

"I'm afraid not. I know what you're trying to say. You're trying to say that the human spirit

at its most courageous can never go down to utter defeat. If it's defeated once it will rise and walk again. But you've got to be realistic about that. Life is always a struggle and if you take it for granted that you'll win that struggle anyway—you may not win it.

"I've said that our pilots are better trained than the Enemy's, and they are. I'm simply stating a fact. I've said that our radar is two hundred miles better than theirs, and it is. Another fact. But our men are dying faster than we can replace them. And the Enemy's men are not. The Enemy stays very much alive.

"With odds like that are you still convinced we'll win in the end?"

"But you said—a different type of trainee. Some kind of psychotic. I thought sanity was the surest guarantee of survival in any struggle."

"Ordinarily it would be. But we're up against something monstrous and abnormal. Something that has all of our best sane minds baffled completely. Understand me, Ann. I'm groping in a very terrible kind of darkness. We've got to do something with the Screeper to keep fear at bay. Monstrous, paralyzing, killing fear.

"When a child wakes up at night in a darkened room and starts screaming his mother can sometimes soothe and quiet him with a few reassuring words. But

not always. Sometimes he'll go right on screaming and become so terrified she'll have to send for the family physician—a kindly man who may or may not know what to do. He may have to use very unorthodox methods.

"We're babes in the woods here, Ann. We're not so much the physician as the screaming child itself. Maybe the doctor will try to get the child to help himself, save himself. The doctor and the screaming child will be fused together in a kind of super-personality—half child, half wise man. Such a personality may appear to function psychotically. But it may also have a very good chance of succeeding."

"I'm not sure I should have asked you to talk about it, Alan. You'll have to think about it again tomorrow and talking about it now may not do you any good at all. Perhaps we should go back to talking about how to persuade me to love you in the right way."

She moved closer to him and for a moment he couldn't quite fathom the expression in her eyes. He was struck by guilt, because he knew that he had been more than a little unfair to her. He decided to repeat the words she had said to him.

"You create too many problems for yourself, sweetheart," he said. "You should live more from moment to moment. Didn't Walter

Pater say something like that once? About living for the moment with a hard, gemlike flame? Only—let's not make the flame too hard and gemlike."

VI

GARVEY AND HIS companions left the theater and moved casually across a broad, elm-shaded avenue toward the Common. Garvey and Tabor walked abreast and Freddy lagged some thirty paces behind. There was stark fear in Wills' eyes and his steps dragged a little. He seemed to be in no hurry to catch up with death wearing only the thinnest of disguises.

There was a cool breeze blowing across the Common and it would have been a nice evening if it hadn't been for the War. The War spoiled the evening for almost everyone, but it was spoiled in an exciting way as far as Garvey and Tabor were concerned.

They paused for an instant to listen to a stump speaker who was apparently a little cracked. The War had made a lot of people either wildly neurotic or mildly psychotic and the stump speaker belonged in the second category.

The stump speaker was saying: "It's really very simple when you analyze it. You hear a lot of talk about science leaping so far

ahead of human wisdom and human morality that there's no possible way of preventing War. But let's take a sober second look at what science has accomplished. All over the world medical science has advanced in seven-league boots. People seldom die young anymore—if you write off the accident toll and the War toll.

"We've conquered disease in a three-way victory. Antibiotics cure or control every bacteriological or virus-carried disease in medical literature. Old age has been retarded by an incredible advance in gerontal knowledge. We know exactly what causes aging and how to slow up the process. And diet—good diet has done more to increase the health of the under-privileged than decent sanitation. But both have played their parts. A three-way victory. A glorious victory.

"Or take industrialization. Science has enabled us to build machines which have completely eliminated machine-operating drudgery for two billion men and women in every corner of the world. The average work-day even in Indonesia is now five hours. And atomic fission has made the world's dwindling natural fuel supply of no consequence whatever. We don't need oil or coal—we have harnessed the wild stallions at the core of exploding suns.

"The tortured human being

himself? Modern psychology has at its disposal techniques which should completely eliminate that torture. Were it not for the tension and the horror of War there would be no psychotics. Poverty? Yes, yes—we have a little of it left. The under-privileged are still with us. But we are making tremendous strides toward eliminating slums and poverty and in another twenty years—

“But I am straying from the main point—the point which I’m convinced must be made forcibly now if it is to be made at all. It must be hammered home, so to speak, and I intend to do so with all the gifts of eloquence at my command.

“Why do we all live in constant fear? Why does War threaten our very existence and the existence of our children’s children?

“I’ll tell you why. *The airplane*. First the airplane and then—spaceships, space stations, space flight. Just think for a moment. If the airplane had never been invented all of the great advances of modern science could have been used for the exclusive benefit of mankind! Think, think, think. If we still rode on horseback or traveled in coaches—or even if we traveled solely in buses and express trains and ocean liners and did not possess the airplane, the spaceship?

“Man is unstable, you see. He is like a radioactive isotope. He

is magnificent if something he is powerless to control with his mind does not trigger him to a sudden, world-destroying explosiveness. Air travel is hyperdimensional. It enables a man to get immediately over and above the people or the social structures he would like to see erased.

“It’s a quick, sure, terrifying way of *striking back*. Of striking out hard without carefully weighing of all the issues at stake—without any psychological planning or meditation or the kind of wisdom-sense that dominated the thinking of the ancient Greeks. No vessel of human intelligence as volatile as the human organism should have been exposed to such a temptation—”

“I think he’s got something there,” Taber said.

“It’s all Greek to me. Maybe he’s got a grudge against the guy who first invented airplanes. Who was it?”

“A guy named Wright, you dope.”

“Then this Wright guy was a wrong guy, if you ask me.”

“I’m not asking you. But why don’t you ask him?”

“All right, I will. . . . Hey, Buster! Who invented the airplane? Me and my friend here would like to know.”

The stump speaker stopped talking abruptly. He fixed Garvey with an irate stare, his lips setting into tight, resentful lines. He was

a small, wiry man with a great shock of red hair which bulged out on both sides of his head.

"I don't like to be interrupted by young hoodlums," he said, his voice forceful. "But just to keep the record straight I'll tell you. His name was Curtis."

"Yeah. Is that really so, Buster? My buddy here claims it was a guy named Wright."

"Young man, the matter has been in dispute for well over a century. But no good purpose would be served by discussing it with you. The man who invented the airplane is criminally responsible for the plight of the world today. But I'm quite sure that the meaning of 'criminal responsibility' would completely elude you. Your ignorance is too abysmal."

"You lousy crackpot!" Garvey said, a dark flush creeping up over his cheekbones. "Who do you think you're insulting?"

"That's a strange word for you to use, young man. You cannot insult a person without human dignity or respect for his elders. No, I'll be fair. Not all elders deserve respect. I should have said that you can't insult a person who does not even know the meaning of personal integrity and has no reason to care what anyone else may think of him."

"Fancy-pants words. You're going to take them back."

The knife came out, snapped

open. Garvey advanced on the stump speaker with the blade half-concealed by his palm and his shoulders quivering in enraged-bull fashion.

The stump speaker's audience scattered. It was a very small audience—an audience with no strong convictions in regard to the speaker and hence with no capacity for martyrdom. The one woman gasped in horror and retreated backwards across the pavements. The seven men simply turned and walked away quickly.

Had the men realized that the speaker was tragically and hopelessly insane they might have stayed to defend him, if only out of compassion. But his psychosis was an unusual one. It had swept away his emotional stability but he still retained sufficient residual contact with reality to enable him to talk glibly and with erudition. Indeed, there was considerable truth and logic in his contentions, and only a first-rate mind could have demonstrated that he was the kind of lunatic who could ride a monomania with an outward display of almost absolute normalcy.

You can fool most of the people a good part of the time with that kind of psychosis, and Garvey remained completely unaware that the stump speaker's curse of the airplane was a psychotic fantasy.

Garvey could not have said

exactly *why* the man was a crackpot. He only knew that the poor devil's mind was *wide open*. It was vulnerable, it was full of squirmy worms of fear and false hopes—call them organically damaged neurons if you're so inclined—and the man himself was so locked in a death grapple on the shifting sands of unreason that Garvey could with savage joy think of him as a *perfect victim*.

A physically weak man has much to fear from primitive human brutality. His only recourse is to the Law, and the Law is seldom on hand to assist him when his need of protection becomes urgent. A mentally unstable man is in an even worse predicament. If he summons the Law he may find himself facing not a rescuer, but a remorseless and misguided accuser.

Garvey knew this only too well. Advancing on the speaker with his knife in readiness he hardly gave a thought to possible police interference.

In this case, he felt, it wasn't necessary. If the cops saw what was going on and rushed in to interfere he, Garvey, would become a law-abiding citizen. He'd simply point to the speaker and say: *He's ticky in the coco. Just look at him! Look at the way he's jerking his shoulders around, listen to what he's saying. If you had a sister would you want her*

to stand here and listen to talk like that? Sure, sure, he's starting to clam now. But before you got here you should have heard him. And there was a woman right here and when I saw what was going on I knew I'd have to do something.

"Keep away from me!" the stump speaker warned. "I'll summon the police. I'm not afraid of you. That knife doesn't frighten me."

"It doesn't, eh?" Garvey said, winking at Tabor. He grabbed the speaker by his coat lapels, precisely as he had grabbed Wills, and let the blade of the knife rest coldly for an instant against his victim's right cheek.

"Oh, God!" the little man breathed.

"Now then," Garvey said. "Take it back. Talk it all back slowly and carefully."

"What do you mean? What do you want me to say?"

"You said I was ignorant. Do you still believe that?"

"No, I—Oh, damn you, yes! I do mean it. You're ignorant and brutal and vicious."

Garvey's eyes seemed to change color. Always dark, they became ink-black, opaque. "You don't want to go on living, is that it?"

The little man remained silent, his eyes on Garvey's face. He seemed hardly to hear what Garvey was saying. Possibly he did

hear but the knife was inching so swiftly toward his jugular that he could hardly have been blamed for keeping his mouth shut.

"Well, Buster? Do you take it back, or do I take it from here?"

"Here comes a cop!" Tabor warned suddenly, gripping Garvey's arm. "The creep's got a license to speak. He may not be as crazy as you think."

Garvey released the stump speaker with a curse. He stepped back and snapped the knife shut.

"Quick, put away that shiv!" Tabor warned. "We've got to breeze—and fast."

Garvey hesitated, wondering if he should brazen it out. Give the lousy crackpot something to worry about—a night at least in the clink. He'd been prepared to force a showdown right in the presence of the cops. Was he turning chicken?

No, that wasn't it. But a guy had to go through with his plans, when once he had something big worked out for kicks. The crackpot wasn't important. He'd thrown a scare into him and watched him turn white—so what more was there to do? He'd had no real intention of finishing the windy creep off. First-degree homicide could get a guy in deep and keep him breathing in prison smells for a third of his life.

Garvey turned and saw that Freddy Wills had crept up like

a jelly mouse, and was waiting for him to take off. Tabor was waiting too, his face anxious, one eye on the cop.

The stump speaker had seen the cop now and was opening his mouth to shout. Garvey inched forward, nodding and smiling, and drove his fist into the crackpot's stomach, hard. The little man groaned and sank to the pavement like a lump of lard dropped on a skillet by a chef with no time to waste.

"Okay, here we go!" Garvey said. "Don't run—just keep walking away fast."

They walked away fast. They headed for the Common in a direction that was somewhat roundabout, keeping to the shadows of the big elms and pausing only once to light cigarettes and wolf-eye a passing blonde.

There were six big recruiting trucks lined up on the Common, a hundred feet apart. It was just a question of choosing the right one—the one least likely to explode. But since there was no way of telling from the outside how alert—or careless—the guards might be inside, the problem really boiled down to picking a truck with no bomb display on its rear platform.

There were two such trucks and Garvey picked the nearest one.

"Here's how we'll work it," he said. "We're just three guys who

can hardly wait to enlist, see? We'll let the sergeant come out on the platform, give us a quick up-and-down and start talking. Then we'll go up the ramp while he's getting his hook straightened out, bait and all. I'll rock him with a hard right just as you go past—or maybe I'll smack him first across the mouth to keep him from yelling out. Then I'll topple him down the ramp to the pavement. By then you two should be inside the truck.

"Inside there may be two or three guards. We each take care of one. We don't let it turn into a general scrap—just one guard apiece. If I have to use the shiv—okay, I'll use it. But I don't want to use it. Any questions?"

"No questions, kid," Tabor said.

"Okay, then. Why are we standing here?"

Garvey started walking toward the truck, assuming an easy, nonchalant air, a cigarette dangling from his lips. Tabor walked almost at his elbow and Freddy Wills trailed by a scant seven feet.

They reached the truck's tail-lights and paused directly in front of the ramp, staring up to where it broadened out into a circular platform.

Almost instantly a recruiting sergeant emerged from the darkness overhead and stood staring down at them, his genial face

illumed by the glow of the street-lights on the Common.

"I take it you lads are just drifting around sight-seeing," he said. "Maybe you'd like to stop drifting for a minute or two and come inside for a cup of coffee!"

Tabor nudged Garvey's elbow. "That's a new pitch," he whispered. "They get you drugged with caffeine and up you go into space."

"Pipe down," Garvey cautioned. "Let him talk. If he invites us inside a second time we'll take him up on it."

"Why not right now?"

"Shut up—quiet. I want to size him up first. He's a husky looking bastard."

"How about it, men? We've got some War trophies inside you might like to look over. We've got a propeller that came off an Enemy TU 99 that was launched from a twenty-jet mother ship in low flight over Texas. They could have bombed out three cities but our men got them first. We've got a flare bomb that could light up every state in the Union. We've got a little helium bomb of our own—all triggered and ready. You set it off with acid that eats its way right down to where it's radioactively unstable."

"That sure is interesting," Garvey said. "The Enemy must have done a lot of sweating."

"You bet it's interesting. Any young fellow who could look at

some of the things we've got inside here and wait around to be drafted ain't my idea of a *man*. We like fine, bright, multi-stage installations—don't we, boys? Just to run your hands over them makes you feel proud to be a part of what's going on. It's bigger than we are—a tribute to the resourcefulness of the men in the big-bomber labs. We'd trade it all in for a sure, lasting peace, but we can't wait around for peace to come—not when the Enemy is right upstairs. Come inside, men."

"We're coming," Garvey said. He tossed his cigarette away. "Go up easy and quiet," he whispered, patting Tabor on the arm. "Don't let Freddy get ahead of you. If he goes inside first he'll mess everything up. We want to get a good feeling out of this."

"I'll watch it. Let's go."

Garvey walked slowly up the ramp, a broad grin on his face. "You been upstairs much yourself, sergeant?" he asked.

"You bet I have. High cabin temperatures sent me to the hospital five times. But I'm back on the job, as you can see. I go up again tomorrow."

"Maybe so, sergeant," Garvey said. "But tonight you go down for a lousy count of ten."

Garvey didn't adhere to his original plan. He hit the sergeant three times. The first blow caught him in the pit of the stomach and

doubled him up. The second was a hammer-blow to the small of his back just above the kidney, as he lurched forward and the third was a savage repeat which sent him spinning down the ramp.

He twisted sideways an instant before he hit the pavement and rolled over twice. He didn't move after that—just lay sprawled out like a heavy grain sack that had met with an unloading foulup and was waiting for a lifting crane to straighten it out.

Garvey's eyes were very bright. So far, everything was working out. He stepped back and let Tabor go in first. But when Freddy's white, frightened face came close he pushed him back and whispered fiercely: "You look scared as hell. Keep behind me, and pick the smallest guy. Use your knuckles. When you get him down bang his head against the floor."

The advice proved unnecessary. There was only *one* guard inside and Tabor had moved into his neighborhood so fast and brutally that he was flat on his back when Garvey and Willis came into view. Tabor was bending over him, half-dragging, half-pushing him toward the door.

Garvey seemed disappointed. "Only one hopped up soldier to guard a truck like this? Who'd have believed it?"

"He nearly got me," Tabor wheezed. "He came at me with

a wrench. Come on, give me a hand with him."

"Okay. We'll toss him out after the sergeant."

Garvey bent and grabbed the guard by the neckband of his dun-colored service jacket. In a moment they had him out through the door and were rolling him down the ramp.

It was just like tossing a second sack after the first.

Tabor was breathing heavily when they went back inside, but Garvey remained poised and cool.

"First we've got to get that ramp up," he said. "There's the switch—see it? 'Ramp Release' in big red letters. Go on, throw it and see what happens."

"Maybe it won't raise the ramp," Freddy said, his face drained of all color. "Maybe it's just to let the ramp down."

"What the hell! Come on, get over there and reverse it. That's all you have to do."

Freddy obeyed. He crossed to the switch and threw it to dead center. There was a loud, churning sound. The truck began to vibrate. Garvey walked out on the back platform and stared down. His face remained calm.

"It's going up, all right!" he called back. "No cops in sight. The soldier boys aren't moving."

"Come back in here and help us!" Tabor shouted. "I'm not sure I know how to drive this heap!"

"Sure, I'll be right there. Keep your shirt on."

Drive right down the Common and then open up. We keep going and maybe circle the freight yards and come straight back. We bust speed records getting back. We show 'em we're not afraid to come back. Maybe we don't pick up a dame tonight. Maybe we do. There's kicks in this even if we don't pick up a dame. We'll show 'em we never punk out.

"Hey, what's keeping you? You want to have the whole United States army on our necks?" Garvey cried.

The ramp was almost up now. With a creaking and a rasping it slid into grooved bearings high up under the platform.

Garvey lit a cigarette, very slowly and deliberately. Then he went back inside.

"Okay, everybody," he said. "Now we can get started."

VII

ANN HAD TURNED the phonovision on. Alan was staring at her shapely legs as she sat on the sofa opposite him, but for the moment, at least, it was a purely clinical scrutiny. He'd read somewhere that European males did not particularly go for trim feminine ankles. They liked them, of course, but there was no fetish adoration involved, no particular concentration on that particular

aspect of femininity. American males did go for shapely ankles—in a big way. Why? It was a little difficult to understand.

"What are you thinking about, darling?" Ann asked, between a PV commercial and the blank space which followed it.

Alan started to tell her and then decided against it. You couldn't come right out and say to a woman: "I was thinking about your ankles," and not expect her to get angry.

That was the ironic part of it. Here he was thinking thoughts which any woman would have been overjoyed to have spelled out for her in big, shining letters. And he couldn't even start off with those few simple words, *I was thinking about your ankles. Nothing else about you is quite so important to me.*

"You must be thinking about something? What is it, darling. The Screeper again? Can't you get it off your mind for just this one night? How would I feel being married to a man who wakes up in the middle of the night and says: 'I'm terribly worried about the Screeper. Maybe I should get up and get dressed and go back to the station. Maybe the Screeper needs me. Or maybe I need the Screeper. You don't mind, do you, honeybunch? I'll be back early and we can have breakfast together.'"

"It could happen, of course,"

Alan admitted ruefully. "But the War won't last forever."

"I sometimes wonder."

He was spared the embarrassment of a reply by a sudden interruption of the commercial. It was not just a blank space this time. It was an emergency, police-military, news-flash, and it came in loud and glaring.

"We interrupt this program to bring you a War Office Emergency Announcement. A recruiting truck has just been seized by three unidentified men on Boston Common. The truck has left the Common and is heading north. The men are young—possibly teen-age delinquents. But we have no positive assurance that they are not Enemy spies intent on sabotage.

"We repeat. We have no positive assurance that the men are ordinary criminals. The truck contains two small atomic warheads. The warheads have not been activated, but there are solid rocket propellants in the truck which could be used to blow up military installations anywhere in the city. If the men are technicians with a specialized knowledge of nuclear weapons there are materials in the truck which could easily be used to activate the warheads.

"The Common must be cleared of all traffic immediately. It will be used by the police and the militia as a base for pursuit op-

erations. Aerial and ground pursuit installations are now being set up at both ends of the Common. All pedestrians and all vehicles must leave the Common. Repeat—all civilian vehicles must leave immediately.

"The truck is now being traced by radar. In a moment we will have more definite information. Until pursuit planes are in the air the danger will continue grave. We urge that you stay tuned to this station."

Alan groaned. "Until pursuit planes are in the air" he said, striding across the room to move the brightness and contrast dials forward. "This should be a *ground pursuit* job all the way. Forty or fifty years ago they would have handled it better. That's progress for you—with cleated shoes. Forty years ago there were police cars at every intersection. The instant a short-wave alert went out they started converging on the lawbreaker from a dozen directions."

"But there are atomic bombs in that truck," Anne protested. "I should think aerial pursuit would be absolutely necessary."

"What can a plane do?" Alan demanded. "Drop an even bigger bomb? It's making a mountain out of a very deadly kind of molehill."

His lips tightened. "Everything could go. Bunker Hill, Paul Revere, the Old North Church.

Emerson, Hawthorne, Lowell. Two centuries of Harvard, Beacon and Chestnut Hills. The Lodges speak only to the Cabots and the Cabots speak only to God. Even that kind of snobbery would be better than no Boston at all. Everything could go—and all because some maniac in the War Office puts live atomics in a recruiting truck!"

"But the bombs can't be activated. At least, not easily."

"Can't they? Inside that truck are little phials of acid. You pour the acid into a pin-sized hole in the warhead and it eats its way to the fission mechanism in precisely thirty-two seconds."

"Phials of acid? I don't believe it."

"Why not? Everything must be genuine—the real McCoy. They've been using live ammunition in war training maneuvers for a century and a half. Why not also to stimulate recruiting? Do you want recruiting to fall off? Of course you don't. You'd rather have—no Boston."

Alan spoke with the bitterness of a man so completely in the grip of unreason that he had half-succeeded in convincing himself there might be only a few more minutes left in the world to talk at all.

"Let a man run his fingers over the real McCoy, let him be convinced that just by a flick of the wrist he could destroy a city—

and he'll want to make sure that the Enemy doesn't get a chance to destroy *his* city. The feel of death right 'under your thumb. There's nothing like it to stimulate recruiting—or so the War Office claims. They could just as easily fill those phials with water.

"But someone just might find out, someone might carry tales. Besides, it's the honorable way. Lies are for the Enemy. Rather than do anything that smacks even remotely of deception the War Office would rather have no Boston. It's a beautiful kind of idealism. But sometimes I think that sober, realistic thinking departed from the human race long before the first Neanderthaler cracked a skull."

"I still don't believe there are phials of acid in that truck," Ann said with stubborn conviction.

"Neither do I," Alan conceded grudgingly. "But there might just as well be. I was merely using that as an illustration. There are other ways of activating an atomic warhead. And you don't always have to be an expert—if the trigger mechanism is nine-tenths in place. A little carelessness, a lurch against a side rail and—no Boston. Naturally they wouldn't tell you that in an emergency broadcast designed for public consumption. It might alarm the ladies. They'd be a knitting-circle outcry and the War Office would be in trouble."

Alan shook his head in anger, his close-cut hair catching highlights from the screen. "It would be one case where a knitting circle outcry would be justified. I can give you a much simpler illustration. Just picture Boston as a big, smoking crater—"

He was interrupted by another flash bulletin. An announcer of national prominence appeared on the screen, a cavernous-browed young man with a genius for making the most of spot-coverage assignments.

"Hilton Emery," Ann said. Under ordinary circumstances she would have added, "Oh, I like him!" But the circumstances were hardly ordinary and Emery seemed prepared and determined to make himself disliked, if it should prove necessary.

Emery said: "The War Office has instructed me to warn all unauthorized civilians to stay away from the Common, the shipyards and the city's guided missile installations on Chestnut Hill. Civilians disobeying this warning will be subject to instant arrest and will face very serious charges. I repeat. Unless you are an authorized person or a member of the armed forces on active duty you must stay away from all of these areas."

"Civilians in general are advised to stay indoors, to keep off the streets as much as possible. All commercial traffic has been

halted throughout the city. All strollers have been halted. All helicopters have been ordered to stay on the ground. No one must enter the underground. Trains will be running, but any civilian who attempts to board a train will be halted and questioned by the military.

"The recruiting truck has been located. It has encircled the Air Research and Air Development Command Center and is heading back toward the Common. There are a good many planes overhead now. Ground crews have been alerted and ten helicoptic jets are about to take off from Simpson Field. Road blocks have been set up as a precautionary measure on all important intersections north and northwest of the city. A street-by-street security alert system is in full operation throughout the city.

"But for obvious reasons no attempt can be made to halt the truck from the air or by ground intervention until it returns to the Common. Specialized equipment has been set up on the Common for this purpose, and air and ground units have worked out a plan of attack which should have a very good chance of succeeding. The situation is serious, but there is no justification for panic. I repeat. There is absolutely no justification for panic."

"He doesn't believe that for one moment," Alan said.

His voice was matter-of-fact, but there was something in his eyes which made Ann stiffen in concern. She had seen the look before. They were both silent for an instant and she kept hoping that his expression would change. A touch of caution and self-restraint would have changed it, but she realized even before he spoke again that there was no caution in him.

"I'm *not* an unauthorized civilian," he said. "Just by flipping open my wallet and displaying an identification card I can be on the Common when the big show starts."

"Alan, you wouldn't—"

"Why not? I can be there in five minutes. It's just a few blocks. I can make it in a fast walk. No need to drive, and risk having some trigger-happy soldier take a pot-shot at my car before I can wave my card at him."

"No, Alan—please. You can't *take* such a chance. You'll be walking into an inferno. You—*you*—"

"Yes?"

Her voice quavered and almost broke. "You must be out of your mind. You must be, to even think of such a thing. You've no right to go—no right to be there at all. You'll just be in the way. If you're killed you'll have only yourself to blame."

"A good many men may be dy-

ing tonight," Alan said. "If they have to use just one small atomic projectile to stop that truck—well! I want to be in on it, Ann. I know it's hard for a woman to understand. But I've got to be in on it. I've no choice. The big show is too near—only a few blocks away. If I stayed here and just let it happen and didn't participate I'd feel rotten about it all the rest of my days."

"You'd feel better in your grave?"

"That's unfair, Ann—and you know it. I'm sorry. Can't you see how it is? I've wasted a full minute, just trying to make you understand. I can't waste another."

He kissed her before he left, but she did not open her lips to receive the kiss and her arms did not go about him.

She watched him go into the entrance hall, put on his hat and glance back at her for an instant with accusing eyes.

Then the door slammed.

She barely hesitated at all. The coldness of the kiss she had given him was like a lump of ice resting on her tongue. It wasn't his kiss which had turned to ice, but her own half-kiss and it lingered with her and its coldness was so great a reproach that she felt like screaming:

"Come back, darling. I didn't mean it. Come back, and I'll kiss you as you've never been kissed before. It may be the last time—

the very last time I'll ever kiss you. I don't want you to go to your death thinking I don't love you, thinking I'm cold. Oh, please, darling—just give me one more brief last chance!"

She knew what she'd have to do, of course. She'd have to run. If she was going to follow him and overtake him she'd have to run until she was out of breath—and even then she might never see him again. He would walk fast, very fast and he was a man and he had a long stride.

Well, a woman's stride could be long too. A woman with a knife in her heart doesn't have to worry too much about appearing feminine when she runs to bring all of herself to the man she loves. He'll forgive her and overlook it, even if she has to run like a Tom-boy.

Out of the door and down the stairs to the street she raced, telling herself that it was too late, that he had already turned the corner, that the night had swallowed him. She had lost him forever and there was no hope now, no light in the darkness, no way of bringing him back.

Then she saw him. She was outside the apartment building now and she saw him heading for the corner and the wide intersection beyond, saw the light on his shoulders as he moved further and further away from her into the night.

She began to run. She might have caught up with him then, but a cab moving south in defiance of the stand-still forced her to halt for an instant in the middle of the intersection and when she broke into a run again he had quickened his stride. She shouted for him to wait, to wait only for a moment, but the night was too loud with competing sound.

Planes roared overhead, and there was a droning everywhere and she could hardly hear herself when she shouted . . . and she could hardly hear. She ran until she was out of breath and kept on running, but she could not quite catch up with him, for he had begun to run too.

They were very near the Common now. She could see the lights in the sky, crisscrossing, weaving about and the rocket flares and the shouts of the military, and she wanted to die.

It was a man's world and she was not a part of it—no woman like her could ever really be a part of that world. Nurses could be a part of it, and women ambulance drivers and staff officer assistants. But she just wasn't that kind of a woman, she couldn't even stand the sight of blood.

Why couldn't he stop for just one little moment, pause to look around him, pause to look up at the sky. There was death in the sky tonight, terrible with great

dark wings unfolding. Death and destruction for three men in a truck.

What were the men in the truck like? In stealing the truck they had behaved like Alan in a way. They had embraced danger as if danger were a woman, terrible and fiery and insatiable in her demands.

Why did danger seem to draw men like a magnet? Why did they always walk toward it instead of away from it, inviting destruction, inviting the thunderbolts?

Not all men. Some men were simple cowards. But those who weren't seemed to embrace danger for its own sake, as if it were a positive good in itself.

She had never thought herself capable of running so fast. She had almost caught up with Alan now and yet there was still a barrier of distance between them that her footsteps could not span.

The Common was in clear view when she saw the truck. It was coming in fast from the right, a banner of light streaming out before it. She knew at once that it was the expected truck, the only truck that could have taken away her life by taking Alan's life.

She stopped running. Alan stopped too, a few feet from a soldier with a half-raised gun. In another moment the soldier would have stepped forward and challenged Alan's right to be there, would have demanded to see his

identification card immediately.

But that moment never came. There was a sudden burst of gunfire, and the Common became bright with crisscrossing beams of light and the sky itself seemed to turn to flame.

VIII

FREDDY WILLS WAS screaming. He was clinging to a swaying copper rail directly behind Garvey and screaming because he could not keep the fear locked up inside him any longer. It had become so unbearable that he didn't care if Garvey swung about in the driver's seat and put a quick end to his life.

Garvey's face was white. Tabor wasn't saying anything, just swallowing hard as he helped Garvey drive the truck, a man who was still too much of a boy to fully realize what was happening. What was happening would stop the truck before long, and Garvey knew that time was running out on him.

He would have very little chance of escaping from the truck alive. The thought was hateful to him, but he wasn't frightened. That was the strange part of it. He felt good, almost exultant. The truck was under fire and shells were exploding all about it, but even the hateful thought of death did not frighten Garvey. It did not frighten him and even though

it was hateful it could not keep him from feeling good.

We've got them scared, he thought. They're afraid of what's inside this truck. The white-livered bastards! They don't dare try to get us with an atomic projectile.

Why was Freddy screaming? To be such a weak sister was one hell of a thing. Any guy who was born that way should be dropped on his head at birth.

He turned suddenly and said: "Stop that, Freddy, or I'll kill you."

Freddy went right on screaming.

Another shell burst outside the truck. It sent a dark line zigzagging across the windshield, but the glass was unbreakable. It could not be shattered.

Tabor muttered. "We should never have come back. Never! We didn't have to do this! I must have been crazy to listen to you!"

"Shut up!" Garvey said. "I'm not sorry we came back. We'll make those brass-shouldered punks bring out the whole army and the air force—just so we can watch the monkeys turn green. Don't take your hand off that brake. But don't slam down on it either, unless I tell you."

"How far can we get? If we stop now they'll stop firing. Do you want to be blown apart?"

"Sure, why not? It would be worth it."

"Kid, you're out of your mind.

I should never have listened—”

“You did listen. Don’t forget that. We’re all in this together. In another second, though, there’s goin’ to be just two of us. Can’t you make that fluff-boy back there shut up?”

“Maybe he has a right to die anyway he wants to,” Tabor said.

“I won’t die screaming. If they get me in the lungs I’ll die wheezing, but not screaming. I’d cut my head off before I’d scream.”

“You’re not so tough. You’re just crazy.”

“That’s what you think,” Garvey said.

Two more shells burst outside the truck. There was a low whining as steel-jacketed bullets hummed past, hundreds of bullets that were accomplishing nothing at all.

“They’ll drop a bomb on us if they have to!” Tabor warned, with the huskiness of anguish in his voice. “They’ll risk anything to stop us. There must be a hundred planes upstairs. You hear that roar?”

“Let them try,” Garvey muttered. “A bomb could miss us and hit them. You think they want to kill ten thousand soldiers?”

Freddy had stopped screaming. There was no longer any breath left in his lungs. He leaned against the rail, making gasping sounds and wishing that he could die.

He was remembering things about himself he wanted to forget.

He was remembering the teacher who had said: “Go up and stand in the corner, so that the whole class can see what a sloucher you are. A boy with self-respect doesn’t go around slouching, with his hands in his pockets. He doesn’t whisper out of the corner of his mouth. Things like that start in the home. Your parents were too indulgent. They’ve made a sissy out of you.”

It hadn’t been true at all. His parents had tried to kill him once. First his father had beaten him with a stick and then his mother had come home drunk and beaten him even harder. He’d almost died that time. He’d almost died . . .

Why was Garvey so different? His father had beaten him too. But he had sassed the old man right back, he had told the old man off right to his face. Why couldn’t he hate his father like that. Why was he afraid to hate his father? Why was he afraid not only of his father, but of everybody?

Garvey was cruel and mean, just like his father. So he feared Garvey almost as much as he had feared his father. Now he was going to die . . . because he feared Garvey. It was terrible, he couldn’t stop it from happening.

Garvey turned around then and looked at him. There was hate and loathing in Garvey’s eyes, as if by ceasing to scream Freddy had

proved himself even more of a coward.

He realized then that Garvey really wanted him to go on screaming. It gave Garvey pleasure to hear him scream and scream and scream. Well, he wasn't going to give Garvey any more pleasure. Let them kill him. He didn't care. It would hurt Garvey more than it would hurt him. There wouldn't be anyone left then for Garvey to torture.

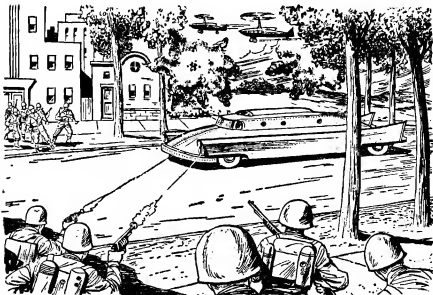
Garvey would be alone then. But I don't want to die, Freddy thought. I'm afraid to die. If another shell explodes I'll start screaming again.

Another shell did explode—an-

other and another. The truck was careening now. But Garvey stopped that by turning back to the wheel, by giving all of his attention to just staying alive.

"We'd better stop!" Tabor moaned. "We haven't killed anybody. It won't be a murder rap. We can walk out with our hands raised and stay alive."

"To them what we've done is worse than murder," Garvey said, his voice harsh with a strange kind of malice. "We're not just holed up in a farmhouse, fighting off the cops. Did you ever hear of treason—high treason? The country's at war. They shoot guys just for going to sleep on guard duty. What



do you think they'd do to us?"

"Why did I ever listen to you? Why?"

"For kicks," Garvey said. "I'm the guy who knows how to arrange them. Now shut up—and watch what you're doing."

There was no real need for Tabor to remain alert, for Garvey was now in full control of the truck. And suddenly—the shells stopped exploding.

A silence descended on the Common—a deathly stillness that was like the lull before a storm, the hush that precedes an avalanche. The soldiers had receded into shadows, had ebbed back on both sides of the Common like a tide turned abruptly ghostly, a tide so completely without substance that it was receding without even stirring the seaweed on the rocks.

Even the planes overhead had somehow miraculously succeeded in muffling their jets. Or so it seemed. Probably they hadn't actually—probably there was still a dull roar overhead. Probably the stillness and the silence were partly subjective, a stunned awakening to the absence of shellfire on a broad avenue that had grown unnaturally quiet. There was a contrast, at any rate, between the present stillness and the almost deafening blasts which had been coming at five-second intervals an instant before.

Unfortunately for Garvey there

were things about military science which he did not know. In an age when ships moved through the darkness of space far beyond Earth's orbit nuclear warheads still remained the most powerful destructive weapon known to man.

But there were other weapons. There had to be. Every weapon of war that has been tested against an enemy and has lessened that enemy's striking power can be used in additional striking missions on many fronts and under widely varying circumstances. Tactics change and weapons are altered or modified accordingly. There are small, powerful weapons that have been used only rarely, and have proved of no great value in space. But all weapons have some value, and there are occasions when a rarely used weapon can prove uniquely suited for a particular task.

What Garvey did not know was that when liquid fuel is fed into an engine it must speed up when it passes through a very narrow section of tubing, and will slow down again only when the constriction has been passed. Every physicist is familiar with this flow phenomenon, every hydraulic engineer—but Garvey was neither a physicist nor an engineer.

If by some miracle that narrow-tube flow could be further increased it would quickly pass far beyond the speed of sound and eventually the tubing would ex-

plode. It would take quite a little time.

Knowing that it would take time, the military had kept the truck under constant shellfire until the important weapon, the ultimate and decisive weapon, could accomplish the mission for which it had been designed.

The speeding-up ray was projected from an instrument that was squat, black and goggle-eyed, and as it revolved on its turret amidst a powerful fire-support crew of very able men it looked not unlike a midget planetarium projector revealing the marvels of the heavens to an excited group of youngsters.

But of course it was really nothing of the sort. The soldiers on the Common were not youngsters, and if you looked higher you could see that the sky was black with war birds waiting to swoop.

The soldiers on the Common hoped that the planes would not be needed. They were granted their wish, but what happened wasn't in the least spectacular. A few of the soldiers may have been just human enough—just angry and embittered enough—to have rejoiced in the spectacle of an exploding truck, a truck suddenly shattered by a violence both terrible and self-contained—a violence that would make the entire Common quake and yet miraculously fail to spread.

But it just didn't happen that

way. The truck simply slowed down, and came to an abrupt halt. Had the soldiers been inside the truck they might have heard the explosion, but even that is doubtful. A bursting, small, fuel-feed tube makes very little noise.

But if they wished for excitement—for drama and terror—it was not denied them. It was a cruel thing to wish for even when cruel lives were at stake, and perhaps if they had known what was to happen they would have turned away, white and shaken and reviling themselves.

Death striking at random is always a terrible thing to watch—and when it strikes a young boy human memory is irretrievably seared.

From the back of the truck three youths leapt and raced across the pavement to the shelter of a long row of trees. The trees had wide, spreading branches and the shadows beneath were wide, dark and deep.

But the shadows were not wide enough or deep enough to save the last of the three. He was too slow in leaping from the truck, too slow in running and the machine gun burst struck him just as he reached the tip of the longest shadow—struck him and spun him about.

He sank to the pavement clutching at his chest, a dark wetness welling from his throat, a bewildered, hurt look in his eyes.

It was over in a moment.

Three soldiers converged upon him and one of them bent quickly and covered him with an army blanket. And so Freddy Wills was welcomed into the army at last, and it is quite possible that the knowledge would have pleased him had he been alive and awake and aware of how warm the blanket was, how snugly fitting. He might even have thanked the sergeant for tucking him in so securely. The sergeant had forgotten to blame him, to accuse him, and his eyes were even a little moist and that too might have pleased Freddy Wills.

Neither the police nor the military could keep the crowds back. They ignored all radio warnings, swarmed from homes and bomb shelters, filled every street and square immediately adjoining the Common and overflowed onto that broad thoroughfare itself. They broke through all protective cordons, mingled with the military and rubbed elbows with the high brass.

And caught in that seething mass of excited men and women were Alan and Ann. They were together again, arm in arm, their bodies touching and at times seeming almost to blend, so grateful were they to be reunited once more.

If there was need for long-range ground support, they had it, for the crowd buoyed them up.

But it was entirely possible that if they had been alone on the Common they would not have been aware of their aloneness—or surrounded by an even denser crowd, would have thought themselves alone.

"If you'd had time to give that soldier your pass what would you have done?" Ann whispered, her fingers tightening on her companion's arm. "Exactly what, darling? I'm curious."

"I'd have been the complete fool you thought me, I guess," Alan said, his much stronger fingers closing very firmly over her hand. "I'd have walked up to General Snodgrass and asked him for a cigarette. 'Hi, General! I'm the guy who's been working on the Screeper. You know—to keep ships and pilots from being blown apart in space. Everyone knows me. It's a top-priority job, very important. I'm a big shot, just like you, General. I understand you boys have been having a little trouble here tonight. Anything I can do to help?'"

Ann laughed and snuggled closer to him. "I bet you would, at that. It's probably just about what you'd have said."

"Darling, is that fair? I joke about something, and you throw it up to me."

"I'm not sure we should joke at all," Ann said, her eyes suddenly shadowed. "We're letting ourselves forget they got only one

of the men who made off with that truck. The other two escaped. And the one they shot down wasn't really a man at all—just a boy in his late 'teens. I'm glad it happened further down the Common. I'm glad I didn't have to see it."

"So am I," Alan said. "But you've got to remember that those men—or boys—did something pretty terrible. Even a boy in his 'teens knows what an atomic explosion can do to a city. I lean backwards in the way I feel about juvenile delinquency. I don't believe that we need harsher enforcement of the law—harsher punishments of any sort. We need far more sympathy and understanding.

"I don't let the sadistic professional moralists fool me—not for a moment. We have to stretch out a helping hand. If we get kicked in the teeth now and then it can't be helped. Every daring social experiment is a risk, as I've told you. But there are a few limits—" Alan let the words trail off.

"But he was just a frightened boy. To machine-gun him down—"

"That was a tragedy. It shouldn't have happened. But those soldiers had no way of knowing he wasn't an Enemy spy. They were under strict orders to shoot to kill, the instant anyone leapt out of that truck and tried to escape. In all good conscience, you can hardly blame them."

"No, I suppose not, Alan. But it seems—horrible."

"Life can be horrible for anyone at times—the innocent as well as the guilty. The innocent are more often than not harder hit than the guilty. Scoundrels make out very well in all walks of life, although we're not supposed to think so."

To lighten Ann's mood Alan said ruminatively. "I sometimes think I have a little of the scoundrel in me. Perhaps that's why I don't do too badly."

Ann started to smile, but something stopped her. She didn't know what it was at first—it was just an uneasy feeling, a chill premonition that she was being watched by someone.

Then she saw the white, haggard-eyed face in the weaving crowd, the eyes trained directly upon her, the lips moving soundlessly. It was just one face in a wall of faces, but it stood out from all the others.

It was the face of a quite young man—possibly only two or three years older than the boy she had just been talking about. She thought she recognized the face, but she couldn't be sure for a moment.

Then she was sure and a perhaps not wholly justifiable feeling of panic came upon her.

He was looking at her now with eyes that seemed to undress her as he stared, that made her want

to turn away quickly, lest she do something foolish. She would have liked to strike out at him, to slap his face in anger. What right had he to look at her like that? He was a beast and she was quite sure that he knew it.

It wasn't the first time he had looked at her like that, but it was the first time he had dared to do it quite so openly. There was an added contemptuous something in his eyes now that made his stare twice as insulting—an assurance that had been lacking when she had seen him watching her on the corner outside the Propulsion Fuels Building.

- His look seemed to say: *I can wait as long as you can, sister. I'm in no hurry.*

And it was true, although she had no way of knowing what Francis Garvey was thinking. There's no hurry, he told himself. A few weeks may go by before my chance comes. I'll wait all winter if I have to. A chance will come. It's got to come. I want her.

Suddenly the face was gone.

Ann pressed closer to Alan, shivering a little. "Take me home, darling," she whispered.

IX

THE GREY BOSTON winter finally surrendered to the onrush of spring. Eight-oared shells chased the last ice off the Charles. Boys and girls from a dozen schools

walked and sprawled on the deepening green of the river banks as the sunsets grew friendlier.

And Dr. Alan Kerr worked. He began to remember the ten and twelve hour days when Screep training was his only concern, as a dimly recalled vacation.

There was no let-up in Screep training. If anything, the program was intensified, for the drain on crews was greater than ever. And on top of this was superimposed a crash research program. Alan's week was split down the middle. Three days for training; three days for research; Sundays for conferences, and sleep when he could get it.

The finest instruments they could devise detected nothing but radar coming from the enemy ships. Flickering and pulsating oddly, and frighteningly powerful with new advances in range, but still only radar.

In laboratories all over the country, engineers argued, wore out slipsticks, drank oceans of coffee, and swore. Computers grew cranky. Rocket men worked to make the ships a little lighter; redesigned nozzles, looking for a little more range; redesigned controls, searching for a way to lift some of the dreadful burden of that intricate, all-or-nothing combat pass; fought for another hundred miles of radar range, and yet another hundred miles.

Careful questioning confirmed

the dying pilot's note. The crews admitted they were making their passes in almost uncontrollable terror, which increased as they neared their target, and increased cumulatively from mission to mission. But they took their ships out gamely, and went back for more.

And the decontamination squad was kept busy and more burial services were read.

The men in Human Resources tried vainly to find a way to fit a Screep into the functional compactness of a fighting ship, hoping to pick up a fragment of useful information. They combed the combat records, looking for the set of ratings that would give a crew the best chance.

Trainee types were refused that had never been refused before. Types were tried that had never been tried before. And gloom hung heavy over them all. They knew that at the very best, their work was only a stop gap—to hold the line till the real answer could be found.

An answer they probably didn't have the time to find.

The team working on the basic problem—Dr. Alan Kerr's team—carried the heaviest burden of all. Though he worked at the heart of an all-encompassing security system, he felt the whole country looking over his shoulder. Psych men and electronic men worked in teams, trying to solve the riddle

of the direct transmission of emotion—trying to throw away the ultrasonic link, the Resonator they had been so proud of. Now fear—deadly, growing worse day by day—often took the place of pride.

In laboratories that had always run smoothly and informally, the words 'slave driver,' and 'glory grabber' were heard. Tempers grew frayed. Lifetime friends snapped at each other. Planning conferences exploded into bitterness between navy and scientists that would leave scars for years to come. And always, beyond the immediate bitterness, the frayed nerves, loomed the specter of dying men.

Spring wore into summer. The Charles filled with boats, the sounds of happy youngsters and worried mothers. In the evenings, music from the esplanade drifted softly against the windows where Alan and his team worked. They were working with two Screeeps, trying to convert ultrasonics back to electronic waves duplicating the original neural currents.

They did it, but it didn't work, as it had failed to work before. The electronic waves did not stimulate the corresponding emotions. There was something missing, and they wrestled with the problem day after day, knowing that it contained the answer they were seeking.

A steady flow of improvements finally slowed the climb of the

casualty figures. In August they lost twenty-five ships to get seventeen. General Staff went over the production figures, loss ratios, intelligence reports, and decided that with a three-for-two loss ratio they could just barely hold for a year.

Where there had been only the darkest despair, hope began to grow again. A few of the more optimistic research men decided the worst was past. Others, including Alan, felt the situation was a little early for anything but finger-crossing.

Their darkest fears were confirmed in September—Black September—when they lost fifty-three crews and forty-two ships. The figures were top secret, but losses like that couldn't be kept secret. And as their horrifying import sank in, a black depression settled over the labs.

Productive work slowed almost to a stop. The researchers went through the motions, doing the best they could. But the spirit, the teamwork, the hope of success had been broken. There just wasn't enough time.

In the United Nations, Teleman, leading Enemy spokesman, displayed a new and ominous affability, as he announced that his confederation was considering the construction of a station on the moon for the purpose of conducting studies in astronomy, earth meteorology, and lunar geology.

For a period of about two weeks, depression continued to deepen over the labs. A few of the researchers got drunk, threw wild parties, made reckless love, in apartments that had held all-night bull sessions. Then, as the shock began to lift, the programs slowly got under way again.

It was during this period that Alan called Ann Fitzgerald for the first time in days. Her mood lightened the instant she heard his voice. She'd been feeling profoundly depressed, caught in the contagious gloom of the news reports. Although the teletypes were not carrying the casualty figures, there were somber references to the impending end of the War, which told the story clearly enough.

There was a bantering relief in Ann's greeting. "Where have you been, you louse? I'll bet you've been taking out every blonde in Boston."

He grinned. "How did you guess? I've been taking them down to Havana, three at a time. Your turn's next. But meanwhile, how about dinner and a show with me this evening?"

"Darling, this is so sudden. Will you meet me at that bench near the Swan Boat—the one we sat on with wet paint, the first time you took me out? Then we could go over to Locke-Ober's for chow."

"What time?"

"Eight." She pursed her lips at him. "And wear a carnation in your left lapel, so I can recognize you."

He took a long lazy shower, mixed himself a tall scotch, and read a magazine for an hour. The editor was getting a bit crotchety lately. Still talking about learning to handle ourselves as well as we handle our environment, but he was beginning to sound discouraged. Couldn't blame him for being upset when they'd had to forbid all depressing plots. The story wasn't bad—about an Enemy pilot who did everything wrong.

Then he fell asleep. When he awoke, he was more relaxed than he could remember. He dressed slowly, savoring the thought of seeing Ann, wondering what she'd wear, remembering the graceful way her body moved as she walked—dignified, yet so model-glamorous.

There were very few people on the belts, crossing the bridge. He stayed on the slow belt to enjoy the view of the river. One of those long golden October sunsets had placed a halo over the whole city. With time to kill, he sauntered over to Beacon Street, and then slowly down toward the Common, basking in a quite novel feeling of freedom from the grind.

It was surprising how the problems that had seemed so desperate had lost their terror. Things still looked almost hopeless, but

they'd probably work out. People had been saying for thousands of years that "if we don't win this war, civilization is done."

And civilization, such as we have, still struggles along. Maybe this will be just another war. Maybe there'll be five or six years of fighting, and then we'll win, or the Enemy will win, and we'll go along for twenty or thirty years till we have another one. Maybe there won't be any war at all. Perhaps it will be kept in space, and we'll all adjust gracefully to whatever happens out there in the next year or two.

He couldn't feel terrified at the thought of more wars like the ones that had been fought before. It had a reassuring feeling of historical continuity. But he knew it was only his buoyancy of the moment, talking. Underneath was the dreadful knowledge that this would be like no war ever fought before—that this would be biblical catastrophe. And with some understanding of how far above the primeval swamps the living organism called civilization towered, how complex and interrelated its physiology, he had an appalling awareness of how far it could fall as it died.

Living things fought with such incredible strength and tenacity to live—against disease, other living things, the whims of violent nature. And yet, when some invisible level was reached, which

passed beyond their limitations, they died with equally incredible ease—including civilizations. Your feelings grow out of watching them deal with things they could more or less cope with.

When something came along just a little stronger, they died with hardly a struggle, and you watched—with uncomprehending horror. He remembered the summer—he was nine—when he discovered that the ant colony under the sidewalk that he had battered ineffectually for four years with water, salt, fire, dirt, rocks, and flyswatters died in satisfying seconds under a half tumbler of kerosene. He remembered his unbelieving confusion. *They must be some other ants. These can't be the ones that were so hard to kill.*

A bomb on one city out of five—probably the country would survive. Two cities out of five . . . maybe. Three out of five . . . uh uh. He shuddered.

He forced his mind away from visions of America in her death throes, and discovered he was in the Common. It was quiet here. Three pigeon panhandlers, their heads cocked sagely, looked him over, decided there was no meal here, and moved on to more profitable activities. The hazy blue-green quality of the twilight seemed intensified in the still air among the trees.

In the silence, a woman started to scream—a piercing anguished

scream—somewhere nearby. It lasted a few seconds and choked off abruptly, as though a hand had been clapped over her mouth. The sound keened down his spine like an electric shock. He found himself in a half crouch, his ears straining to locate the sound.

It came again, a tiny fragment of a scream, lower in pitch, bubbling with despair, and choked off again.

He had the direction and started to run. As he passed a cluster of trees, he sighted what he thought were two figures in motion against a low clump of bushes about a hundred yards away. In the uncertain twilight, they looked like two men doing some weird kind of dance.

There was a flash of gold, as a girl's head twisted, and the scene lit up for him as though a spotlight had been turned on . . . blonde hair in a pony tail! *Ann Fitzgerald!*

There were two of them. One held her arms behind her. The other grabbed the hem of her dress with both hands, and in one powerful motion, ripped it completely off, releasing it at the top of his motion to flutter down behind him in a pink and green shimmer, like a dancer's scarf. He bent again to grasp and lift her ankles while the one holding her arms, unkempt dark hair down over his eyes, pulled her head back and lowered her to the grass.

Alan had a torturing glimpse of Ann's white legs stark amidst the greenery.

He was running low and silently, like an animal, completely unaware of the growl deep in his chest. He never knew where he had picked up the rock in his hand. He was about fifteen yards away when the one holding Ann's arms tossed the hair from his face. Their eyes locked for a frenzied instant. The man snarled a warning to his companion as he jumped to his feet.

But the other, engrossed, was still bent over Ann's struggling body. Alan ran up to them. He aimed a kick at the back of the bending man's head as he dove for the one who was standing. He was clawing for the young beast's neck, and would have torn his throat out with his bare hands, if the rock hadn't prevented it.

He felt a numbing blow on the side of his head, and his vision danced. The momentum of his charge had carried him right into the man, and as he threw a punch at the snarling face before him, the man went down, with Alan on top. He felt a pain in his hand, sharp, agonizing. But he still had the rock as he spun, to find the one he had kicked, staggering, stooped over, and dazedly holding his head.

As Alan started for him, he came out of his fog and fled into the gloom. Alan threw the rock

after him and felt an excruciating pain dart up his arm.

The young thug he had hit was unconscious, blood covering the side of his face from an ugly cut at the temple. Ann was still lying on the ground, sobbing uncontrollably, her head rolling from side to side, her body very white in the darkness. He bent over her, and untied the rag from her mouth.

"It's all right now, honey," he whispered reassuringly. "It's all right. It's all right. It's me, Alan."

Her eyes unglazed into anger . . . "The filthy, loathsome—" A shudder travelled her entire body and she settled into a new spasm of sobbing.

Alan helped her to her feet. She covered herself with the remnants of the dress, and he put his jacket over her bare shoulders. He tied the thug's hands with the rag, kicked him to consciousness, and dragged him to his feet. He was only a kid—eighteen or nineteen—and his face was pure hatred. He tried to kick Alan when he turned to Ann, but Alan instantly knocked him down again to a new stab of agony in his hand.

It seemed to take him hours to get the two of them out of the Common, his arm around Ann's waist, the kid just in front, mouth- ing a steady stream of obscenity and abuse. He turned the kid over to a policeman, along with the

story of what had happened, and agreed to come to the station as soon as possible to prefer charges. He flagged a helicab and took Ann home, her teeth chattering now with aftershock.

He left her with a stiff drink, promising to return as soon as he had finished at the police station and walked over to Berkeley Street, thinking over what had happened. There was something tugging at his mind—a feeling of important information buried in the experience. He kept seeing the kid tossing his head up from Ann's struggling body, his eyes turning instantaneously from savage desire to blinding hatred.

The proceedings at the police station took less than half an hour. Alan recounted the incident into a polyrecorder, watching with interest as the graphs faithfully registered the ebb and flow of his emotions through the story. Two officers led the prisoner in and stood him before the lieutenant in charge.

The wound on the youth's temple had been sealed, but the implacable hatred on his face remained as though carved in. While they re-played Alan's statement, he looked slowly and coldly around the room, meeting the eyes of the eight people present with a calm intensity, like a caged panther. Two of the men and the woman looked away under his defiant stare.

When the statement was finished, the lieutenant informed the prisoner of his rights to a psychologist and a lawyer. The kid continued to stare at him, and said nothing. He said nothing when the lieutenant asked him who he was, and where he lived and explained what would follow conviction for attempted rape—six months of psychotherapy at the Cambridge Institution for Rehabilitation, and if judged incorrigible—"resistant"—ten years in the State Institution of Restraint.

Even when a fingerprinting expert arrived to identify him—Francis Garvey of Third Street, South End—and when Records tagged him with seven counts of loitering and disturbing the peace, two of vandalism, two of resisting an officer, two helicab thefts, one count of rape—at age twelve—and one of attempted rape, his expression remained unchanged.

The lieutenant, who had been trying in a surprisingly gentle way to reach the youth, gave up as he heard the record. His shoulders settled slightly. The kid's IQ was 140. He had spent most of his life from fourteen on in Juvenile Institutions of Restraint. Three periods of psychotherapy were all labelled "resistant." He ordered the prisoner taken back to his cell. Garvey shrugged off the hands of the two officers and preceded them out, looking as remote and defiant as when he had come in.

Walking back, Alan kept thinking about Garvey. There was something about his manner that intrigued him—an isolated completeness, more catlike than human. In an almost absolute sense the youth had been formed in the mold of the jungle. Everybody is your enemy. Life is yours on loan, for only as long as you can protect it.

And he'd beaten this jungle animal—and another like him! Alan's shoulders squared unconsciously, as he remembered the brief violence—his own incredible anger. Yes, there had been a tinge of fear way down underneath it, too. His thoughts shifted to Ann. It had been a terrible ordeal for her. She was ordinarily so self-possessed, with a child's faith in the basic goodness of others.

She met him at the door—she had discarded the torn dress and his heart pounded at the sight of her—and clung to him with a mixture of little-girl dependence and clear-eyed longing that matched and reinforced his own feelings like a mirror image. They were in each others arms before he had even closed the door.

X

IF IT HADN'T been for the peculiar quality of perceptiveness that alternately irritated and fascinated him in Ann, Alan Kerr might have gone back into the

twenty-four-hour turmoil of the labs without ever capturing the vagrant thought that was teasing at the edge of his consciousness.

An hour after his return, they were sitting over bacon and eggs in the kitchenette, talking out the terror of the experience in the park. Alan had done his best to ease the shock within her, but she sensed after a moment that he was preoccupied.

She paused in the middle of pouring him a cup of coffee to look down at him quizzically. "You're somewhere else, aren't you?" she said.

He stared into the half-filled cup and drew a long breath. "I can't get over that kid Garvey. His father was a drunkard—disappeared when the kid was eight or nine years old, and hasn't been heard from since. His mother is in the State Institution For Non-Curable Insane—paranoid. The kid has been outside the law ever since he could act for himself. He hasn't a real friend in the world. I doubt if he could even understand what the word means. And yet he's as tough and complete as a wildcat.

"At the station it was like an allegory. There were seven men and a woman in the room. The whole weight of his society was arrayed against him. I found myself starting to feel sorry for him—looking for a flicker of regret, or fear, or even concern that I

could sympathize with. But all that showed was this pure flame of hatred and defiance. The police were pretty decent, too. A couple of them were trying hard to reach the kid. It sounds odd, but there was a kind of unity and invulnerability about him that I couldn't help admiring."

He didn't notice Ann's face stiffening as he talked. Three different times she recoiled as though he had slapped her face. Then all at once there was a short, screaming hysterical outburst, and he found himself standing dazed outside the apartment, still hearing her sobs as she slammed the door on him, her accusing words echoing in his head:

"Admiring an animal who hasn't a speck of decency, or respect, or fear of God in him." *Hasn't a speck of decency, or respect, or fear of God, or fear of God, or fear, or fear, or FEAR!*

He was halfway home before he realized why she'd been so furious . . . why she'd thrown him out.

Alan wrestled with the idea for three days, before he decided to talk it over with the project head. The thing was so outlandish he was afraid he'd be laughed out of the office, or worse, relieved for lab fatigue. But the more he thought about it, the surer he became that he had an answer. Not *the* answer, but a solution good enough to gain them some of the time they needed so desperately.

Dr. Murchison's face was lined and weary with the months of failure. He snapped out a preoccupied, "Good morning, Alan," and looked impatient.

Alan started to change his mind, and then thought of the casualty figures. He took a deep breath. "I have an idea I'd like to try. You'll probably think it's crazy. But if it works, it will give us some time we can use."

He had at least succeeded in gaining Murchison's attention. The chair squeaked loudly as the lab director leaned back. He said benignly, "Nobody's going to think you're crazy, Alan. Most really new ideas sound crazy when we first hear them. And we respect your capabilities perhaps more than you do yourself."

Alan looked down, looked up, and blurted it out. "I'd like to try resistant juvenile criminals as combat crews."

Murchison's chair came down against his desk with a crash. "Have you gone crazy?" he roared. Suddenly he smiled. "Okay, let's hear it."

"Out loud, it's a pretty thin line of reasoning, but it developed out of some ideas I've been kicking around ever since I first got into psychology. It has a validity for me that goes beyond what I can put into words."

Alan described the attack on Ann the previous Sunday, and the way he had been fascinated by

Francis Garvey. While he talked, Murchison pulled a gigantic Oom Paul pipe from a drawer in his desk, inspected it fondly, and plunged it into the humidor on his desk, stuffing it to the brim with one hand. He grunted his approval when Alan came to the part about how Ann had ordered him out of the apartment.

Alan went on. "Back in the forties and fifties, there was a husband and wife team named Glouck who did an elaborate study of the patterns of development of first-grade children, correlating behavior characteristics with the types of emotional difficulty that developed later.

"They found that the behavior patterns that indicate future delinquency were completely different from those that foretold neurosis. As you probably know, their work was the basis for the Disturbed Children Program they finally installed last year in the primary schools here in Massachusetts.

"Anyway, reading their work, I couldn't help feeling that the kids tended to fall into one group or the other, according to the amount of inherent physiological and psychological drive they had available, to resist the various pressures they were subjected to. One kid with repressive parents might become vicious and defiant of all authority. Another in the same situation might become—squashed in on himself, meek and neurotic.

"A water buffalo and an ox may be closely related biologically, and may weigh about the same, but their endocrine systems—their entire nervous systems—are inherently different. One is organized for attack, the other for docility." He paused, as Murchison took the pipe out of his mouth. But the director merely inspected it thoughtfully and replaced it between his teeth."

Alan paused, reached for a cigarette, lit it, and went on. "The more I thought about it, the more I became convinced that the kids who became delinquents, outlaws, who fought back against domination—at least the ones who fought back openly—were by heredity a higher drive group than those who surrendered and became civilized. And beyond a certain point, the only way out *is* surrender. There is no tyranny more complete than that available to a parent.

"Lawlessness, you see, is a man fighting against a tyranny which oppressed him when he was a child—a tyranny which no longer exists. Since it's an irrational fight against a non-present-time threat, it's insatiable. A kid starting out by sassing his teacher, can be drawn irresistibly to the point where he kills, and dies snarling at the police, unless at some point he surrenders, and admits to himself that he hasn't the guts to rebel beyond this point.

"I've never had much personal

experience with completely hostile kids, though—not until this thing the other evening. It's just been a set of ideas I carried around to play with, when there was nothing better to do. But watching that Garvey kid transmuting everything into anger brought the whole thing back to mind."

Murchison had been listening with an unreadable expression, his arms overlapped behind his neck, puffing infrequently at the huge pipe. He disengaged it now from his teeth, to ask: "How does all this relate to the problem we are attempting to solve?"

Alan continued, surer of himself, laying his sentences down carefully, one by one, like a man building a tower of matchsticks. "The key to the whole problem is fear. Whatever the device they're using, we know the enemy is disorganizing our crews with fear. Pure, basic, across-the-board fear. And if we can stop the fear now, we'll have the time to figure out how they do it later.

"There are only three conceivable kinds of people without fear," he went on slowly. "Some outlaws, some psychotics and, hypothetically, those who have never learned to fear. Psychotics are out, obviously. Men raised so perfectly that they'd never learned to fear? I've never seen one in all the hundreds of men I've Screeped. There's no way of telling if such an individual would have enough

drive to resist this radiation, or whatever it is, but I'd be happy to try them if you can find any.

"But here's the point I'm getting at. These defiant kids are so completely conditioned to hostility—so completely adjusted to living in a world of enemies that the fear response is completely short-circuited into anger. Their defiance is proof in itself that they have the drive to resist the things that the rest of us either haven't been exposed to, or that we surrendered to in the process of becoming civilized.

"I realize that there are better ways for a man to face the Enemy than in uncontrollable anger, but it's a giant step forward from fear. And I believe that we can choose crews from among these resistant kids who will transmute whatever it is the Enemy is using, directly into anger, without succumbing to the fear that's cutting our crews down." Alan paused, studying Murchison's face.

The project head had listened with polite interest, giving no sign of his reaction. He turned his heavy bulk now, to stare out of the window, and finally spoke over his shoulder. "You think we're civilized only out of fear?" he asked. "That there is no inherent pleasure in getting along with each other?"

Alan wondered vaguely whether Murchison was simply humoring him or sparring for time to

think, but he stuck by his guns. "Of course there's pleasure in getting along with each other—*after* we've learned the rules—*after* we're civilized. But I'm talking about kids who never buckle under—who don't buy the rules in the first place."

Murchison swung to stare full into Alan's eyes. His voice was low, but his words hit with a physical impact, like the blows of a battering ram. "So you want to fight the Enemy with Resistant Juveniles—kids with no fear. Well let me tell you a few things about these kids."

"Let's assume you're right. Some of 'em have no fear. You know what that means? No organism without a fear mechanism—I don't care whether it's missing genetically, or missing by reason of some sort of psychic amputation due to violent experiences—can be considered sane. These kids are nuts. Psychotic. Out of contact with reality. And you know what that means?"

The bit of Murchison's pipe was jabbing savage furrows in the already tattered desk blotter. "It means the first time they get their hands on a ship, they're just as likely to blow up one of our orbit stations—and a dozen ships and crews with it—as not!"

Murchison realized suddenly he was shouting. He scowled at himself and leaned back in his chair. He continued in a slightly more

conversational bellow. "Look: a man without fear is unteachable. He is incapable of conceiving of any consequence of any act of his yielding his own destruction. I don't have to tell you what it takes to be a combat pilot. The coordination, the singleness of purpose. The emotional stability. The devotion to duty . . ."

His head shook slowly and earnestly. "My God, the devotion to duty. And the basic intelligence. I don't have to tell you what it takes. How many months have you put in combing the finest kids in the country for these qualities? If they haven't got it, there's no Screeper in the world that can give it to them. As desperate as we are for men, you're flunking three out of five. And these kids are *trying*, with everything they've got."

Murchison paused to light his pipe again, using a big, old-fashioned wooden match. "I know the situation is bad, Alan—perhaps I know it better than you do. But unless you can show me a safe—and I mean safe—way to teach the things our boys have to know—and be—to kids with no sense of responsibility, no conscience, no fear of punishment, no need to earn the liking and respect of their fellows, I'm afraid we'll have to pass this one up."

It was very silent in the office when the director finished. His last words seemed to reverberate

around the room. Alan felt weary and discouraged. This was the problem that had nearly kept him from coming in with the idea at all. Every time he'd thought of what he knew about resistant juveniles, he'd shuddered, convinced he must be getting lab fatigue if he could even dream of such a suggestion.

And yet, when he thought of Garvey, the individual, he felt the same flash of confidence. In a span of a few seconds after Murchison finished, Alan had gone back over a lifetime of work and thought, and have arrived again at the conviction that Garvey would work out.

He held up an index finger. "Not *kids*, Dr. Murchison. *One* kid. One I've had a chance to get a feeling of. For the time being, I'll settle for just this one. He's a holy terror, but there isn't a trace of slyness in him. The chances are very strong that if we asked him, he'd tell us to take our project and go to the devil. But if I can find the buttons to get him to try it at all—reasons that matter to *him*—then he'll go all the way for us. Or at the worst, if he decides he's had a bellyful, he'll tell us so and quit . . . unless we push him into a corner, of course, and believe me, I have no appetite for pushing him into a corner."

Alan Kerr got up and began to walk the carpet in his characteristic slouch, intent only on getting

across the ideas he'd carried bottled up for so long. "Garvey is no more psychotic than I am. He's in magnificent contact with the reality he'd been brought up in. You know as well as I do that the words 'nuts', 'insane', 'psychotic' aren't a neat basket that some of us fall into and some don't. Most psychotics have sane areas . . . lucid periods. And most of us 'normals' have characteristics that extend toward the psychotic. At this moment there are thousands of people moving into psychosis and other thousands moving out. You and I have been in this business too long to be frightening ourselves with labels.

"The problem of Juvenile Resistants in general; and Garvey in particular, is a lot more complex than just hanging a label on him. I'm definitely against the pat labeling of a man as psychotic or normal, as though he carried a sandwich board on his back, so that all we have to do is read the label and we have the man pegged like a butterfly on a specimen board.

"And while I'm touching on this I'd like to say something else about the folly which some psychologists engage in when they are discussing a man's emotional adjustment to society in general. It helps to illustrate what I mean, even though it does not directly apply to Garvey himself. It is often taken for granted that your

emotionally immature individual is dominated by the so-called pleasure principle and has never learned to subordinate his drive toward immediate pleasurable gratification to some immeasurably larger aim, some ultimate goal or level of achievement which will benefit both himself and society and pay off far more handsomely in the long run.

"But suppose a person reaches so high a level of intellectual discernment that he seriously questions the value of all truly long-range human objectives in a cosmic sense? Suppose he decides that all life on Earth is ultimately meaningless, that we are, as Bertrand Russell one phrased it, 'fly-specks of matter on a midget planet in space?' Suppose he decides, both intellectually and emotionally, that nothing can offer the kind of man he is greater rewards than an immediate surrender to all the delights of the physical world, as the great poets envisioned such delights?

"Suppose he becomes a deliberate, enlightened hedonist—or a cynical hedonist, if you prefer the term—and lets the chips fall where they may, lets the world stew in what he considers to be its own intolerable juices? That may be a philosophy of absolute fatalism, perhaps and I'm not saying I agree with it. But can you honestly label such a man as emotionally immature?"

Alan held up an index finger again and poked it within inches of Murchison's face. "It's important to remember that even so great an idealist as Freud himself—and he was an idealist, a perfectionist in the matter of human behavior—said toward the end of his life that your truly enlightened man may very well decide to live for only two things—women and money. He deplored the fact, but had the intellectual honesty to face up squarely to the possibility.

"So, I feel, it's the height of folly to attempt to pin definite-labels on people at all. But to get back to Garvey. Take this business of no fear. I can see that's what's bothering you the most, even though it might give us the answer we're looking for. It isn't that the *capacity* to fear is absent—a hereditary abnormality. It's simply that he's been so conditioned by his environment that he passes through the stage where you or I would feel fear . . . almost instantaneously. Though I *am* convinced that higher hereditary 'drive,' level of energy generation' or what have you, correlates with less-fear-response—more anger response.

"To me, fear is awareness of a survival threat *plus* uncertainty. Uncertainty as to the extent of the threat, or your ability to handle it. The uncertainty is the key. And when a kid grows up in a world in which he *knows* there is

no love, no rewards for good behavior, and no such thing as a friend, then there isn't much uncertainty. He just assumes that everybody is his enemy and proceeds accordingly. The fellow who said: 'I'll take care of my enemies, but Lord, please protect me from my friends,' knew what he was talking about."

A faint smile crossed Murchison's face, and he relaxed a little, swinging again to the window.

Alan continued without even noticing. "This is what I've been describing as a short-circuited fear response. You and I ordinarily assume that other people mean us no harm. When we meet hostility, we rise into anger reluctantly, more or less slowly. We're trying to decide whether it really is hostility, hoping we were mistaken. We're wishing we didn't have to get angry. We're trying to evaluate the extent of the hostility; and trying to judge how much and what kind of a response will be necessary to deal with the threat. This is the matrix in which fear forms. If a fight starts, then most of the uncertainty is removed from the situation, and the fear disappears with it.

"But a Resistant like Garvey has a peculiar advantage here. No uncertainty. He *knows* everybody is his enemy. He has a relay in his head that clicks over whenever he sees a threat—which is practically all the time—and says:

'attack!'. There's no period of uncertainty. But it isn't a hereditary abnormality. It's a conditioned reflex."

Alan scuffed pensively at the rug, and turned to face Murchison. "I'm aware that the word to describe this kind of a person is 'paranoid', but as long as he's sufficiently in contact with reality to see me as Alan-Kerr-his-enemy, rather than Daddy-his-enemy, or Society-his-enemy, then there is a basis for dealing with him, in terms of his self interest, as he sees it. I'd appreciate the chance to try."

He finished, and stood waiting.

Murchison's head bent to scrutinize his pipe. He examined it carefully on both sides, scraped at a speck with an exploring thumbnail. Finally his eyes lifted under the heavy brows to stare full at Alan, and Alan knew suddenly why he was the project head.

"This Garvey is in an Institution of Restraint now. I suppose you realize how many strings would have to be pulled to make him available, and what might happen if such a project got out of hand. I still say you can't trust one of them with your back turned. It might not turn out well for your career."

"If we don't lick this problem, there may not be any career." Alan sensed a victory he was no longer sure he wanted to win. "I'll forget about locating and

training others like him till I see whether he works out. He may not make much of a pilot, but Doctor Murchison, I'll stake my reputation that he won't be dangerous if he's handled right."

The director smiled unpleasantly. "You *are* staking your reputation, Dr. Kerr. And have you thought about how long it might take to train one of these monkeys to operate a space ship?"

"I've been talking to some of the pilot instructors. I have some ideas about teaching him only the combat pass, and using the regular pilots to take him out and bring him back."

Murchison screwed up his face, and sighed heavily, as though he wished he were somewhere else.

"Alan, I don't believe you'd be willing to gamble with a thing like this if the situation weren't so desperate," he said. "I'm desperate, too. You have a brilliant record, and I feel obligated to go along with you. But remember one thing. This is your project, and your responsibility. If anything goes wrong—you're the goat. Think it over. If you want to go ahead, submit a requisition for what you think you'll need, and I'll see that you get it."

As Alan started to thank him, Murchison cut him off. He said, "Oh . . . one more thing. You don't Screep him. You're too valuable to lose the way we lost Wagner, with that project of his

on manics for isolated duty. Fair enough?"

Alan nodded and when he left his thoughts were far from triumphant.

XI

THE CLEAN CONCRETE lines of the Massachusetts State Institution of Restraint towered out of the ancient, festering slums of Charlestown like a magnificent oak in a town dump. Sharp-edged vertical stripes of greenish shadow and bright orange in the crisp October morning gave no hint of the building's grim purpose—the restraint of sane men who could not be allowed to live at large, yet who could not be rehabilitated by any currently available method. Simply . . . restraint. A society's visible admission of failure.

And yet, Alan Kerr mused, looking down at the functional mass of the building, it was actually progress. He could still remember the uproar on the teletypes when Governor Kennedy had first demanded that state institutions of incarceration be separated according to their true functions—for the curable, and the incurable; for rehabilitation, for restraint, and for punishment, too, if the legislators wanted it that way. It was amazing how much progress and enlightenment had come out of such a seemingly simple change.

The idea of a penal system, for punishment, had vanished in the self-searching discussions that had followed, of what to do with those who were judged unfit to live among their fellow men.

The soft hum of the helicab dropped to a lower note as the cabbie started down, and Alan's thoughts returned to the purpose of his trip. He was nervous about seeing Garvey, and he made no bones about admitting it to himself. It was absolutely vital that the youth go along with the project Alan had so laboriously organized in the past week. On sober reflection, he had been forced to the conclusion that screening unwilling resistants to locate those with an adequate hate reflex was not only impossible in the time at his disposal, but would stir up a political hornet's nest he couldn't handle.

And since he would be dealing with resistants, Screeper evaluations would be undependable, anyway. The only way to tell how they would behave under stress would be to study them under stress, which would be awkward, to say the least. The only one he was sure of was Garvey. It had to be Garvey. But the odds were he'd simply tell Alan to take his project, and blow it out his briefcase.

He went over, once more, the strategy he'd decided on as the only approach that had a chance of success, checking each point in

order. It would have to be a straight, blunt offer of a trade. Any sign of softness, or attempted friendship, would convince Garvey that he was being suckered. And the first misstep would be the last.

The cabbie dropped the last twelve feet. He caught the cab a few inches above the roof, turning Alan's stomach upside down in the process and set down as lightly as a feather. When he turned around expecting admiration, Alan rewarded him with a scowl that instantly withered the grin on his face.

Two guards inspected Alan's collection of passes—seven in all—while two other guards with drawn guns watched alertly. From the way they traded glances, they knew something about his visit, but they offered no comment and asked for none. One, who seemed from his manner to be the ranking guard, said: "Follow me, Dr. Kerr." And started for the elevator head, while the others, still almost ludicrously vigilant, watched the cab safely off.

The guard led Alan directly from the elevator to a large but plainly furnished office with the single word SUPERINTENDENT on the door. The warden, George Scanlon, making no pretense of being occupied, was seated at a desk absolutely clean except for a single folder and a small PV intercom. He rose as they entered, looking Alan over shrewdly as he

dismissed the guard. His manner was courteous, but Alan had the feeling the man was somewhat surprised to find such an unprepossessing intellectual at the end of the chain of influence which had been applied during the past four days.

Alan took a seat in the chair he offered, and discovered he was facing an entire wall of PV screens, four banks high and ten rows wide, most of them in operation, showing various scenes throughout the institution.

The interview lasted about five minutes, with Scanlon doing most of the talking. He was attempting, not too subtly, to learn what they were planning to do with Garvey. Alan murmured a few generalities about tests of new psychological equipment, and Scanlon, visibly put off, launched into a discussion of what these restraints were like, and how they should be handled. Alan remembered little of it, most of his attention leaping on ahead toward the approaching session with Garvey. Amidst the panorama of PV screens surrounding him he found himself wishing the warden would finish so that he could get on with his mission.

And finally, the moment was at hand, with Scanlon himself escorting Alan by elevator and staircase, through at least a dozen barred doorways into a separate gallery, surrounded by tiers of

barred cells. Looking upward, Alan could see that each tier overhung the one below it, and the walkway in front of each tier was mounted on massive hinges, so that it could be lowered hydraulically, leaving any given cell or group of cells in complete isolation.

Garvey's cell was in the next to the top tier. Scanlon introduced Alan with: "This gentleman is here to see you. If there's any trouble, you'll pay for it." He turned to Alan and said, "When you're ready to leave, call the guard."

The cell was more comfortably furnished than Alan had expected it would be. There was an easy chair, bolted to the floor, with a lamp for reading mounted in the wall behind a grille. Beside a tiny stone sink, also set into the wall, was an open steel structure of four shelves, forming a sort of open bureau, with a sheet of polished steel bolted to the wall at the top, serving as a mirror. There were two books on the top shelf of the bureau.

Garvey was lying on the cot. They recognized each other in an instantaneous locking of eyes that tingled the back of Alan's neck in recollection.

They studied each other speculatively while the guard's footsteps died away. Finally, Alan said: "Hello Garvey."

The other nodded almost im-

perceptibly, not taking his eyes off Alan's face.

"I've got a deal for you that could get you out of here. Are you interested?"

An equally imperceptible shrug.

"I'm with the Human Resources and Training Division, Garvey." Alan had a submerged awareness that calling him Francis would arouse his hostility. "We'd like to try you out as a space ship pilot. How does that sound?"

Garvey looked away, to stare at the ceiling. "Sounds like a snow job."

Score one. I've got a response out of him. Alan's eyes brightened. "Let's put it this way. If it weren't . . . a snow job, would you be interested?"

"Keep talkin'."

"Okay, Garvey, here it is. We're having some trouble with our crews. The Enemy has been doing something that makes them scared in combat. I don't care much for you, but I have an idea you don't scare easily. So I'm trying to get permission to test you in the job. If you work out, we'll try others like you. I thought you might like the first crack at it."

For the first time, Garvey showed emotion, coming up on one elbow. "What kind of a gleason do you think I am—to buy that kind of baloney?"

Alan's face hardened. "Okay, Garvey, if that's the way you want

it." He walked to the bars to call the guard.

"Wait a minute, Doc. While you're here, let's hear the rest of the pitch."

Score two. He took the hook. Alan congratulated himself on his planning. He sauntered over to the bureau and thumbed through the two books. Hobbs' "Spacecraft of All Nations," and a catalog of weird and ostentatious designs and accessories for helijets. *What a break. He's a hot-rodder!*

He turned and sliced the air savagely. "There isn't any pitch, Garvey. I'm not foolish enough to think you give a damn that your country needs you—though it does. But it's a chance to get rid of your past—to wipe the slate clean, and get a fresh start, if that means anything to you . . . You'll have the right to kill—legally."

Their eyes were locked again, Alan's flashing, Garvey's cold and hooded. "You haven't killed yet, have you Garvey? But at the rate you're going, you will before too long. And they'll catch you, and lobotomize you, and put you away for the rest of your natural life. Do you know what lobotomy is?"

He grunted as Garvey's eyelids flickered in recognition. "Maybe when you've killed a few of the Enemy you'll have enough of the poison out of your system to settle down and live like a human being among the rest of us."

He threw his ace. "If you're good enough, that is. There are a lot of good men getting killed out there. Better men than you, with years of training. You'll have to do it in months—almost weeks. And if you get killed, nobody will know about it, or care.

"But it's an honest to God chance to be a hero, complete with all the fixings—medals, banquets, beautiful girls and all." Venomously he added, "You won't have to jump them in the Common, either. They'll be chasing you."

Garvey slid his legs off the cot, and sat up slowly. He rested his elbows on his knees and stared at the floor for several minutes. Finally he said in an almost inaudible voice, "I'll think it over."

Alan hid his exultation. "I'm sorry Garvey. We've got just three months to find out if you have what it takes. There simply isn't time for thinking it over. If it can't be you, it will have to be someone else. I tried you first because I know you."

Both faces lightened in unison, not nearly a smile, but a definite sharing of humor that softened the hard tension in the cell. "And I know you're hard enough to be the man I'm looking for. I couldn't come back and ask you again, even if I wanted to. Will you do it?"

Garvey's stare travelled slowly

down Alan's body, rested on his feet for a long moment, and travelled slowly up again. He said, "If you're suckerin' me, Doc, I promise I'll kill you."

Alan checked an impulse to offer his hand—covered it up by going to the bars and calling the guard. He turned. "It's a deal Garvey. You'll be leaving here tomorrow. Get ready for the hardest work you've ever done in your life."

They waited for the guard in silence, each staring off into his own thoughts, ignoring the other.

XII

THE SCREEP SANG its inaudible music; Garvey mumbled his unending river of vicious obscenity; and the walls of the room were wavering and growing dim again. Alan wondered desperately for the hundredth time, why he had let himself in for this agony. Doggedly he turned the gain up a notch, threw out a tendril of fear, and repeated: "Your father, your father, your father . . ."

Back came the terrible pounding smashing hammer of hate, no matter how he set himself he was never ready for it, hate and filth and turmoil pouring and flooding through him and pushing down with incredible irresistible power—down into his bowels until every cell cringed and crawled, numbing him and draining the

strength out of him, strangling him, he was lost, lost in an ocean of hate, the whole universe hating him, was there no end to it, there had to be an end, there had to be an end!

And suddenly, it had ended. There was a blessed quiet and the air was sweet in his nostrils. Every bone and muscle writhed in sheer relief. He heard someone say: "I think he's coming out of it," and opened his eyes.

For an instant, the three figures around him seemed to tower fog-gily, forty feet above his crib. Then the room snapped back into focus, and he discovered he was lying on the Screep Room cot, looking up at Dr. Murchison and two lab technicians. Garvey sat slouched, still in the loveseat, gazing at him under lowered brows with a look of respect, almost of compassion.

Alan blinked and sat up painfully. Every inch of his body tingled and stung as though it had been pounded by mallets. He became aware that nobody in the room was saying anything because of Garvey's presence, and was grateful. His voice was thin and strange when he spoke. "Okay, Garvey, I guess that's it for today. It's about time for your simulated pilotage, anyway."

Murchison waited impatiently until the door closed behind Garvey. "Damn it Alan," he said.

"You've been working with him for three weeks, and this is the fourth time he's blanked you out. You started this thing against my orders in the first place. I have to admire your guts, but do you mind if I ask what's the point? You know Resistants don't Screep. By your own theory, half of what makes this kid a good bet is his hate reflex, and you're killing yourself trying to knock it out of him. There'll be no more of this, understand? He's just another Resistant kid, but I can't replace you."

Alan smiled ruefully. "I know. You're right. I'm not even sure what I've been trying to do. It's just that he's probably going to go out and get killed, and we had to sit around and wait anyway, while he learned pilotage, and I was hoping to learn something about the hate reflex that we could use. But he's too much for me. We'll just have to let him go, and try to learn from the way he performs. How's he coming as a pilot?"

"I was just talking with Jenkins. He's been working him six hours a day in the space trainer. He says Garvey's a natural. Completely free of the bashfulness toward the equipment that slows most of them down. He's taking him out for actual space work next week. He figures that with two or three weeks of practice out at station, on a real ship, the kid



should be able to run a combat pass well enough to get by. He's arranged for Paul Coulter—he's an old pro, one of the best they've got—to serve as navigator-pilot. He'll take the ship out, and berth it, and generally run things. In between . . . well, the kid will have plenty of chance to prove himself."

Murchison paused, and his lips tightened. "I might add that Coulter is a volunteer, and none of us will feel too good if this thing doesn't work out. If you've seen anything, working with Garvey, to change your mind about him, nobody would have anything but respect for you if we dropped it now."

Alan ran a hand through his hair and squeezed the back of his neck. "The only thing I've

changed my mind about was my hope that I could work him with the Screep. He's full of junk, but he's smart, and he simply doesn't know how to be afraid. I'm still betting on him."

It was hard to tell whether Murchison was relieved or disappointed. He shrugged; indicated with a quick, birdlike nod of his head that it was still Alan's responsibility; and departed . . .

Francis Garvey stood tall in the cradle—flexed his shoulder muscles, stretching against the harness—and inhaled deeply, enjoying the luxurious feeling that he owned everything he saw. His eyes wandered over the cockpit—the controls that responded to *his* hand, the instruments and gauges that spoke to *him*, and *he* under-

stood. The sight screen, waiting patiently in the center of the panel before him. Behind him was the whole sleek and shining and deadly ship. *His ship.*

His gaze swung out through the row of ports, noting how the shadow curving across the nose of the ship disclosed slight unevennesses in the metal skin. He smiled at the way the impenetrable shadow curtained off part of Betsy's body—a brazen, legged nude, painted in brash lines and colors by some lonesome technician in his off hours—making her look suddenly bashful, as though she were hiding coyly behind a shower drape.

He looked out to the vault of the heavens, drinking in the blazing millions of stars, still vaguely surprised that the sky was black. After four weeks of training and two combat patrols, he still felt slightly shocked that it wasn't the shining blue of a sunny day on earth—shocked, but excited in a way that the brightest blue couldn't have excited him. Far over at the edge of a port was a thin sliver of moon, close enough so he could see the jagged edge of the umbra. The moon was his, too.

Boy, this was the life, floating along, taking things easy, enjoying the view, far away from those insignificant bastards on earth—he was aware of the planet rolling along beneath his feet, though he couldn't see it. From a childhood

game, a phrase came back to roll around in his mind . . . *King of the world . . . King of the world.*

Absorbed in his own well being, he started at the sudden hiss of power, then grinned as Coulter's voice in the intercom informed him he was about to see some action. "No practice passes this time, Garvey. I've got a live one. You ready to go to work?"

The nose of the ship dropped viciously, swinging to the right.

"Yeah," he said. "I'm ready."

Garvey's awareness of Coulter's low opinion of him had no effect on his rising excitement. Coulter had made no bones about his conviction that this was the most hare-brained project that had ever left earth.

But he was a good soldier. He'd taught Francis everything he could in the few weeks they'd worked together, warning him several times a day—"The first time you get out of line, I'll take the controls away so fast your head will spin."

As it happened, Garvey's suspicions were correct—that Coulter's orders were not to touch the controls during a pass, except for the direst emergency—but he didn't care much, either way.

"Make your cockpit check; lower air pressure to seven pounds; open the bomb port, and arm your bomb."

Garvey obeyed, swore savagely when his increasing difficulty in

breathing reminded him that he hadn't closed his helmet, and slammed the fishbowl down over his head. The sightcreen stayed blank through several minutes of acceleration and coasting, punctuated by Coulter's brutally sudden turns, and then suddenly there was a faint pip at the edge of the screen.

Garvey watched fascinated, as it drifted in toward the bullseye. There was no instructor sitting just outside, feeding that pip into the screen. This was a real one, a ship with men in it whose mission was to kill him. He peered at the inscrutable skies ahead, and back at the screen, feeling the hatred that waited out there. The pip seemed to pulse with a malignance all its own.

Just before the pip reached center, Garvey's head snapped around to the right, utterly without volition. He found himself ready to leap, his hands poised over the harness buckle staring in a raging anger at the spare oxygen bottles hung on the rear wall of the cockpit.

He could have sworn someone or something was watching him—watching with an implacable hatred. As he glared in confusion at the innocent row of bottles, he realized Coulter was speaking. "Do you think that joker is going to wait all day for you to make up your mind whether you want to

fly this thing? For Pete's sake, let's go!"

He shook his head to clear it, deciding instantly not to tell Coulter of the weird incident. Coulter was worried enough about him already. He settled himself at the controls and squeezed the throttle mike button.

"Sorry, Cap. I've got her now. How far away are we?"

Coulter was still irritated, but he sounded unsure of himself—relieved that Garvey was taking over. "We're about a thousand miles out. I have their velocity neutralized. It'll be about one hundred sixty seconds, if nothing goes wrong. Go in at maximum acceleration. Let your bomb go at a hundred miles—no closer—and get out at maximum acceleration. Understand?"

"In max; let go at a hundred; out max. Nothing to it, Cap. Here we go." He pushed the throttle steadily, all the way to the stop, thrilling to the surge of power as his body squashed heavier and heavier back into the cradle.

The accelerometer read 12 G's. *Around 400 feet per second per second.* For a few seconds he called the velocities off to himself . . . *1200 feet per second . . . 1600 . . . 2000 . . . 2400 . . . 2800 feet per second . . . faster than a high powered rifle bullet and only getting started . . .* and the thing was watching him again—closer! He turned his head to

look and the acceleration slammed his face sideways into the cradle. There was nothing there but the oxygen bottles.

With a terrible effort he wrenched his head back around again and stood panting in the cradle, staring but not seeing as the gauges tracked the pass. Relative velocity to target, 4 miles per second—the needle was climbing visibly. Target range about 900 miles, in the stretch just under half of full velocity, where the needle seemed to quiver and crouch for its final leap down the dial.

XIII

FOR A LONG moment, Francis Garvey was on the verge of what would have been the first and last panic of his life. The evil in the corner watched him, creeping closer, choosing its moment to kill him, while the acceleration pinned him helpless in the cradle. Spiders crawled over his skin, as he fought the impulse to turn and look again.

For a space of perhaps five seconds, he struggled wildly and senselessly to push his ton of weight out of the cradle. He finished spent and gasping, filled with a wild helpless rage, as though he were held by a strait-jacket.

Straitjacket. The idea took him back to the first time he'd been

caught, when two giant policemen walked him back to the station, holding his arms behind him, and almost carrying him, so that his kicking feet hardly touched the ground.

Like a string of firecrackers, his mind ran up the chain of times he'd been held, through his mother and his father, and the kid gangs, and the innumerable policemen, and the institutions of restraint, to Wills and Tabor, the recruiting truck and the girl on the Common, to Charlestown and Dr. Kerr. He was on familiar ground now, and a molten hatred rose in him that had only one goal—to live long enough to kill Alan.

He settled his hands to the controls, and scanned the instruments quickly. The pip had drifted six degrees off center, and he eased the wheel over to correct it. Long seconds went by and the pip stayed where it was. He swung the wheel over farther, still with no results. He muttered to himself, "The damn screen's stuck."

He spun the wheel viciously, realizing at the same instant that the Enemy was taking evasive action. Outraged, he hollered over the intercom, "Hey, Cap. They're trying to get away from us!"

There was no answer. Coulter sat in his cubicle, huddled in cataclysmic terror, completely lost somewhere inside himself, bereft of his last anchor to reality—the duty of a pass to be completed.

Garvey's abrupt yank at the wheel had re-established the pursuit curve at the last possible moment. Slowly the pip crawled back to center, and he eased the turn, watching intently, to catch the first sign of movement in the screen. It came again, on the other side of the bullseye, and he corrected again.

The ship drove on—relative velocity to target climbing past 8 miles per second, its increase hardly slowed by the enemy's flight to the side. The lazy shift of the stars was belied by the raw hiss of power and the agonizing acceleration pressure. And Francis Garvey, alone as he had never been alone before—he knew now there would be no help from Coulter—fought to keep a speck of light at the center of a piece of green glass; fought, with wave after wave of hatred, to push back the gathering darkness, to kill the Enemy ship writhing invisibly a few hundred miles in front of him; fought to stay alive long enough to get his hands around Alan Kerr's throat.

The presence behind him was no more than a mosquito bite, lost in the torrents of hatred that consumed him—all but a tiny clear intelligence that seemed to direct from over his head, as his eyes read the screen and his hands obeyed.

The scream of the gyros, as he tracked the casts of the Enemy,

was the only thing that told him whether he was turning or traveling a straight line. He lived only to extinguish the captive dot of light that tried so hard to escape from the sight screen. It was getting harder and harder to hold his target, as the streaking ship narrowed the gap. Dimly he recalled Jenkins drawling, "Keep it under five degrees and the bomb'll do the rest." He couldn't hold it under five degrees much longer.

An amber light flickered on in the panel, then steadied, to mark the 200 mile range. About ten seconds to go. He threw the wheel hard over, to stop one last cast of the enemy, couldn't bring the pip back, hung on grimly, to hold it at three degrees, and as the red light flashed on, squeezed the button on the wheel, cursing the bomb out of the ship on a triumphant welling gout of hate.

Ten seconds to get out of the way. It took two of those seconds to get the ship turned sideways. And at a crawling 12 G's, the ship began to inch away from its track.

Behind them, the bomb, a miniature of its mother, travelled in their former course, accelerating at 15 G's. In its nose, the colony of electronic ganglia hummed busily as they tracked the lump of matter ahead, relays clicking cheerfully as they corrected for its sideward movement.

In the rocket's belly, the bomb was warm with anticipation. The

proximity fuse scanned the skies ahead hungrily, set to go off at the closest point to any object once it got within 400 yards. A clock ticked off the two minutes it would allow the other devices to do their work. And drifting sideways at ten miles per second, SF 582 hurtled along behind its own bomb, two men inside hovering on the edge of unconsciousness, struggling to escape its rendezvous.

Through the haze that filled his mind, Garvey knew that for better or worse, his job was done. If the Enemy hadn't turned in the same direction at the same moment, they were safe. It was standard tactics, if a ship knew in time that it had been zeroed, to match the attacker's break, in the hope of keeping the detonation close enough to his track to include both ships in the explosion.

The Enemy tried it, but he had hardly gotten turned around before the bomb took him.

Snarling his rage, Garvey searched the sky, hungering for the explosion. He turned his head slightly to the right, and discovered the incredible blinding malignance reaching out for him, expanding like a nightmare, jagged as an octopus in the unconfining void. His sideward velocity was unbelievable. He brought his hands up to cover his face, then stared, hypnotized as the fingers of flame reached for him.

For an instant, it seemed he was falling straight into the mass of fire. Then the ship's forward motion became apparent, and the ugly wound in the sky, corruscating down the spectrum, drifted majestically backwards and across their tail.

In the navigator's compartment, Coulter's eyes returned to awareness. He began to cry, softly at first, and then terrible wracking sobs, like a child.

Garvey killed the throttle and went limp in the cradle, drawing long shuddering breaths. He was exhausted, but underneath the fatigue there was a strange quietness inside him, as though thousands of voices which had been murmuring all his life, busily but unnoticed, had been stilled. The quietness worried him. Perhaps he had burned something out. He explored the feeling cautiously; decided he was as sharp as ever; and realized he was enjoying the quietness very much. *Like having myself to myself for the first time.*

He sighed contentedly, and called Coulter, "How 'bout that! Not bad for a rookie. Huh, Cap?"

There was a long pause before Coulter answered. The intercom failed to disguise the hoarse croak that was his voice, "Not bad, Garvey. Get her headed for home, and I'll take her in."

Relative velocity to station was about 16 m.p.s. away. Francis rolled the ship over twice before

he found the earth, shining big and warm and friendly in the emptiness. He set course for home at 4 G's, smiling at the strange arithmetic of space, which would see them speeding backwards for nearly a quarter of an hour while the rockets pushed them forward.

He turned, with anticipation born of long experience, to savoring his revenge on Dr. Kerr, and discovered after a few moments, that the subject was tasteless to him. Like a car stuck in a snow-drift, he backed up; took a fresh start; and charged in again, picturing the various pleasant alternatives open to him, for killing Alan. And again, the subject held no pleasure.

Something *had* happened to him! Incredulous, he began to explore his own mind. He tried a few simple multiplications; found all in order; and went on to probe his memories, calling up his favorite feuds, the humiliations he had kept alive for years, carefully nursing the flame of vengeance, all the murders he had dreamed of, the people he had hated, back to the landlord who had evicted them and made his mother cry, when he was four.

The memories were there, but the hate was gone, washed clean, vanished. He felt lonesome without it, and muttered a vicious obscenity to himself, just to show he was as good as ever. He said it again. And suddenly something

about the picture of himself trying to bring hatreds back to life struck him funny. He chuckled, started to laugh, and was presently pounding the panel with glee, the tears coursing down his cheeks, not knowing whether he was laughing or crying, but enjoying himself hugely.

A little while later, when Coulter wearily docked the ship at station, and killed the fires, Garvey was sound asleep, a blissful, innocent smile on his face.

XIV

THE FOLLOWING DAY, Garvey asked the station commander for permission to return to Earth. He obviously had something on his mind, but refused to discuss his reasons further than to say he wanted to talk to Dr. Kerr. He had taken enough radiation so that he wouldn't be allowed on a mission for several weeks, but space regulations forbade all but the most urgent transport from station to Earth. His request was radioed to Earth. Bureaucratic wheels spun dizzily, and three hours later Francis was on his way.

The news that Garvey was coming down left Alan with mixed feelings. It had come in at 5 o'clock Saturday afternoon. He had been feeling more and more depressed, and had caught himself several times, lately, wishing he'd

compelled Ann to marry him a month before.

He'd been intending to call her, knowing she'd expect to see him that evening, but he was burning with curiosity to learn how the mission had gone. He decided to wait at the lab. He called the spaceport to have Garvey notified where he was; grabbed a quick bite at the cafeteria; and went to work on some overdue reports.

It was nearly midnight before Garvey arrived. Alan had finished his paper work over an hour before, and had been walking the floor of the lab, stopping occasionally to toy with a piece of equipment, or to stare out the windows at the lights of the city across the river, very conscious of the unaccustomed silence in the building.

He heard the elevator doors open and close, and stood waiting by his desk, as the rapid clicking of heels came down the long hall. Garvey didn't bother to knock. He came through the doorway purposefully, then stopped as he saw Alan.

His face was unreadable, showing a mixture of unfamiliar expressions. He carried himself less guardedly—less as if he expected attack at any second—than Alan remembered. He looked better fed, almost handsome in his ensign's uniform.

Garvey spoke first, his voice lower than Alan remembered it.

"Hello, Doc. I came around to say thanks." He smiled a lopsided smile and offered his hand. "About this time yesterday, I was figuring out how to kill you."

"It was that bad, huh?" Alan smiled in return, and suddenly found himself liking this kid. "Feel like telling me about it?"

Francis Garvey tossed his cap on the desk. He scowled thoughtfully. "That's what I wanted to talk to you about. There was something that happened on the pass—something screwy—that I've got some ideas about."

They sat down, and he described the mission, going into careful detail about his feeling that something had been watching from behind him. Alan listened, fascinated, jotting down an occasional note.

Garvey lit a cigarette, and continued. "After I got back, I kept thinking about how the thing seemed to be behind me, but the Enemy was in front of me, and it didn't make sense. Thinking it over, there was something familiar about the way it felt, but I couldn't place it. Then, in the middle of lunch, it came to me that it felt like when we were working with the Screep, only flat—like a machine." He groped for the description. "It didn't have any personality."

Alan nodded. "That sounds like what we've been figuring. They've got some gadget just playing one

tune at you, over and over again."

"Yes, but why did it seem to come from behind me?"

Alan opened his mouth and began: "Oh, you probably—" And then, as the idea hit him, he jumped to his feet. "You mean maybe it's still ultrasonics! You say there was nothing on that wall but oxygen bottles?"

"That's right, Doc."

Alan shrugged into his jacket. "Let's go, laddie. You and I are going to find out what's behind those bottles."

An hour and a half later, a disgruntled lieutenant J.G., still irritated at being pulled from a sound sleep, opened the door to a classroom and gestured them inside. He explained for the fourth time that the patrol ship used here for instruction was similar in every important detail to those being used in combat.

There was one helpful difference. The panels were held by thumbcatches, which took only a moment to loosen. The lieutenant watched in growing alarm, as Alan and Garvey pulled out the entire bulkhead at the rear of the cockpit, and stacked the sections in a sprawling pile on the floor. They found themselves staring at a solid wall of electronic equipment, except for a small crawl hole at the lower right.

Alan looked at Garvey. "Where would you say it was?"

Francis Garvey walked over,

stood in the cradle, and snuggled himself in. He turned, stared, and pointed. "Right about there," he said.

Alan turned to the lieutenant. "Would you know what that box is?"

"All I can say is it's part of the radar equipment." The officer bent to scrutinize the cabinet, and added in a voice that was a sepulchral echo of his classroom delivery, "This section here"—he outlined about a third of the equipment with his hand—"is the radar. It includes six separate sets, which cover every possible direction of approach, the IFF, and the sight-screen radar and computer."

Alan looked at his watch. It was nearly four o'clock, and he was suddenly aware of how tired he was. He drew a small circle on one of the radar cabinets at the point Garvey had indicated, and asked the lieutenant to get him a map of the equipment, with each section labeled, and the small circle located on it. The lieutenant promised gratefully to send it over the first thing in the morning, and they left him staring unhappily at the wreckage on the floor.

The next week was a nightmare. Alan had a long conference with Murchison on Sunday morning, outlining the possibilities Garvey's report had opened up, and organizing the new attack on the problem. They called the Navy, to pass on the hopeful news,

and to recommend that the suspected equipment be examined immediately on every ship in the fleet, to guard against the off chance of sabotage.

And then they spent two days in a running PV conference with the Navy Base and Washington, on whether the work should be done at the spaceport, or the lab. Murchison finally won out, but only after it was made clear that the Navy would receive generous credit in all news releases.

The news of a possible break had leaked all over the labs. By the middle of Thursday afternoon, when the parts began arriving, everybody in the building was down in the corridor, watching and gossiping, and clogging the hallway. Dr. Murchison tried several times to shoo them back to their own work, but finally gave up as they kept drifting back.

It took the rest of the week to get the ship assembled in the auditorium—the only room in the building large enough to hold it—and the Screep moved in. The ship was set up horizontally, so the 'pilot' could stand in the cradle, as in flight. It squatted in an area where the seats had been cleared out, meek and ungainly looking, yet with an aura of secret deadliness about it.

And on Sunday, they settled to work, a small army of thirteen men (three psychologists, four Screep technicians, and six navy

specialists) compared to the three or four Alan was accustomed to. He wasn't happy about it. It gave him an uneasy feeling of things being done that he didn't know about, with so many men running around. But there was no way to avoid it. The job required the pooling of many skills.

Surprisingly enough—to Alan—it was one of the Navy men who cracked the nut, with a small radar transmitter he had rigged, following some ideas of his own. It happened on a Wednesday morning, about a week and a half after they started. Both Alan and Garvey exclaimed "Hey" at the same instant, as a tiny snake's tongue of fear flickered in their brains and was gone.

The whole group froze, as Alan's voice cracked out, "Nobody move! Remember exactly what you're doing!"

And three hours later, after a careful, step by step check of the four men whose work might have been responsible, the entire building was startled, doors opening and heads popping out, as Alan went loping down the corridor hollering at the top of his lungs, "It's the IFF, the IFF, the IFF!"

He burst into Murchison's office and skidded to a stop, as the director looked up, startled, from a handful of papers. He stood near the door, grinning like a college boy on his first binge, and repeated, "It's the IFF."—as though

he were explaining why a light bulb had gone out.

Murchison waited for him to go on; put the papers down, to adjust his glasses; and finally said, "What's the IFF?"

"Identification of Friend or Foe," said Alan. And then, realizing what Murchison had meant, he poured the story out in one long torrent, with hardly a pause for breath, laughing and bubbling and triumphant with vindicated faith, and the release of months-long anxiety; how the IFF was designed to amplify and to recognize the pattern impressed on a ship's own faint returning radar signal by another ship; how the Enemy, by oscillating their transmittal signal—many times as powerful as the returning allied echo—across the range of the IFF receiver, had built up a vibration in the set, which encompassed bits of the tubes, segments of the chassis, and finally parts of the ship itself, as sounding boards for the ultrasonic pattern of fear; and how the IFF was integral with the radar circuits, to prevent some forgetful navigator from fingering an Allied ship for attack, but all they had to do was to provide an on-off switch for the IFF.

Then Alan was gone, running down the hall again, while Murchison, having uttered not a word, was still reaching for the PV switch.

There was just a little more to

it than that. There was an added human factor. It had long been known that the ordinary convolutions of a ship in space disrupt the vestibular apparatus of the human ear to a fairly harmless but far from negligible extent. When equilibrium can be disrupted by any means on a slightly more pronounced scale—a scale that still does not result in actual dizziness or staggering—psychologists have demonstrated that a pattern of well-defined fear in accord with Sorokin's ultrasonics can be generated in a crescendo that mounts and mounts—a fear as absolute and as emotionally crippling as a heavy sword hanging suspended above a man's head.

XV

RESEARCH TEAMS, like baseball teams, or other groups of humans sharing a common effort, tend to evolve a folklore, a sort of loose-leaf biography capturing their great moments of triumph, or courage, or humor. For years afterward, legends would still be accumulating around the monumental celebration triggered by Dr. Alan Kerr's dash.

It started with personnel from all over the building drifting into the auditorium to see for themselves the diseased radar and to swap congratulations, titillating themselves again and again with thrills of terror, as they demon-

strated the discovery to each new arrival.

Pretty soon, somebody broke out a case of beer, scarce and costly under the second prohibition—the creeping prohibition of local option. Shortly thereafter, closets, cabinets, and desk drawers had disgorged enough alcohol to fuel the party into and through the night. The simplest remarks became uproariously funny. Feuds that had lasted for months washed away in the flood of good will, and lifetime friendships flowered between people who had merely nodded to each other in the corridors.

The barriers of restraint went down between men and women who had worked side by side, wanting each other, week after week. Elevator operators and bearded professors sang bawdy songs, arms about each other's shoulders. It was one of those rare unloadings of tension that seem to occur spontaneously—uncapturable within the confines of plans and arrangements—releasing an immense backlog of irritations and depressions, and leaving the participants, when they recover awareness, feeling newborn, with a euphoria that carries over for days or weeks.

Sometime during the early evening, Alan and Garvey found themselves sharing a joke in a darkened corner of the auditorium, as the party eddied momen-

tarily away from them. Alan had been drinking lightly but steadily. He was in that state of anaesthetized inhibition, where social intercourse was sheer effortless pleasure, everybody was wonderful, and the divine pattern in the world was clearly visible, in all its infinite shining simplicity.

He clapped Garvey on the shoulder. "You're not a bad kid, Francis," he said. "I'm getting to like you. You know, there was a stretch there, where I was kind of scared about you. Damn scared. You had a lot of badly crossed-up wiring in you—if you'll forgive the expression. Couldn't tell whether you were going to finish up a hero, or . . . a bum, and make me one, too. You worked out all right though."

He patted him on the shoulder again. "You worked out splendidly."

Garvey punched him lightly in the biceps. "It wouldn't have happened without you, Doc. I really meant it when I said thanks, the other day. You were right about getting out the poison. But if anybody had told me it would all happen in five minutes, even with that gadget pushing me"—he flipped a thumb toward the Screeper—"I'd have told him he was nuts."

Alan banged him on the shoulder again. His voice had picked up a rolling, oratorical expansiveness. "That's right. And what you showed us in those five minutes is

a damn sight more important than this damn IFF, and their damn war."

His face fell into sorrowful lines, almost humorous in its sadness. "Damn Enemy. Serve 'em right if we dropped IFF's all over the place, and blew all the malice out of them in one easy lesson. Then we could get this damn Screech training off our backs, and get back to something worthwhile." Suddenly he smiled. "Hey, that's not a bad idea!" He fumbled for a note pad and scribbled in it, repeating the words as he wrote. "Drop IFF's on the Enemy . . . what was I talking about?"

Garvey's face screwed up in recollection. "Something worthwhile."

"Something worthwhile!" Alan grasped his lapels with both hands. "Do you realize that with what we learned from you, we can cure Resistants—the real bad ones—do you know what that means? And you gave us the answer.

"Of course," he went on, "you won't be any angel for a long time yet. A man is his data, and if you were brought up in a jungle, then the world is a jungle, not just where you feel, but where you think, too. All your data still says the world is out to get you, even if the anger is gone. It'll be a long time before you can trust people very much."

He followed Garvey's stare

across the room to the cute redhead who worked downstairs as a filing clerk, and chuckled. "That's an interesting piece of new data. You've had your eye on Marilyn all day. Planning on taking her seriously?"

Garvey turned to him with an odd, worried expression. "You think she'd like me?"

"Are you kidding? She'd be mad about you. You're a hero."

"Well what should I say? How do I start talking to her?"

"Same as you always do. Just say whatever comes into your mind."

"But how do I . . . ?"

Alan suddenly became aware that Francis Garvey was really worried. The youngster's face was twisted into an unhappy mixture of bashfulness and uncertainty.

Alan stared at him in astonishment. "You're not *scared* are you?"

Garvey gestured vaguely with one hand. "I'm not scared. It's just"—the words came out with an effort—"I've never done this before."

Alan said, "Well I'll be damned." He took Garvey by the arm and started to walk him across the room, talking almost to himself. "This is one for the books. The guy who cracked the fear generator is afraid to talk to a girl. Boy, that mission *really* cleaned you out. If you'd tried to

fly another one, you'd have been a dead pigeon."

Alan stopped walking, with a strange look on his face. When the youth's arm tugged him, he went on again, his eyes slightly glassy.

Neither Garvey nor Marilyn noticed how absent-mindedly Alan introduced them. Nor did they notice when he strolled away muttering to himself, the strange expression still on his face.

Five minutes later, when Dr. Murchison came over to congratulate him for the fourth time, Alan was staring at his hands as though he had just discovered them. His hands were trembling violently.

Murchison started to speak, then stopped and scowled at Alan. "You look funny," he said. "Pale. Here, have my drink."

Alan recognized him with a start. "I look funny? Funny. Y'know what just dawned on me, Murch? Garvey was only good for one mission. If he hadn't found the answer on that one mission, *we'd have had it.*"

Murchison looked relieved. "Of course. I knew that the minute I saw him when he came back.

"Yes, but the only way he found it was that he recognized it felt like the Screep. What if I hadn't tried to Screep him?"

Thoughtfully, Murchison said, "Give me back my drink."

Alan chuckled. "Now to make this party complete. I've got to

make an important call." He headed for the PV in the director's office.

Ann Fitzgerald wasn't the kind of person who could pretend too long. She'd been more wretched than angry for some time. They hadn't seen each other since the violence of their last meeting and parting lay like a pall between them. They didn't quite meet each other's eyes.

"Ann, dear," he said, soberly, and a little abashed. "It looks like we've beaten this thing and we're kind of celebrating over here. I . . . was wondering if you'd care to come over and share it with me."

She hesitated awkwardly for a moment, then smiled her gladness. "Sure, Alan, I'd love to."

"Gee, Ann, that's wonderful." His face lit up. "I'll be over to pick you up right away." He blew her a kiss; reached for the switch, and remembered something. "Oh, Ann . . . I'll have someone with me. Will you mind?"

She looked puzzled, and a little of the stiffness came back into her face. "No, of course not, Alan."

Alan pried Francis Garvey from Marilyn, promising he'd have him back in half an hour. They went over in a helicar borrowed from one of the professors. Garvey wanted to wait in the car, but Alan pushed him up the stairs, and stood behind him as he rang the bell.

Ann opened the door and started to greet Alan. Then she stared at Francis Garvey—almost recognized him. He was looking at her with a sort of wary friendliness.

Her eyebrows went down as she tried to place him—confused by his uniform—and then went up, as wide-eyed, she remembered. Her fingers came up to her mouth, and a flush spread over her shoulders and throat, mounting to her cheeks.

Alan stepped forward and said, "Ann, this is Francis Garvey. Francis, Ann Fitzgerald."

Garvey said, gravely, "I'm pleased to meet you, Miss Fitzgerald. Will you accept my apology for the last time we met?"

Ann stammered and her eyes grew very wide. The three of them stared at each other for a moment, until Alan broke the silence. Quietly he explained to Ann the part Garvey had played in their achievement—the changes it had accomplished in him—and what it would mean for others like him.

Ann listened, the color subsiding from her face. But she was nodding quietly when Alan finished. And when Kerr asked Garvey if he'd mind waiting a minute or two back in the helicar for them, Ann shook Garvey's hand impulsively, and wished him the best of luck.

As soon as Garvey had disappeared around the landing, she threw herself into Alan's arms, and buried her face in his shoulder. When he lifted her chin, to kiss her, she was smiling through her tears.

"How are you darling," she said. "Just stand still and let me admire you. I've never seen you looking quite so young and handsome."

"Can't stand still," he said. "Not right at this moment. Even if you threw yourself in my arms I couldn't manage it."

"Why not, darling?"

"Can't you see why not? I'm two-way intoxicated."

"Just what do you mean by that?"

"Well, I must have had at least ten Scotch highballs. But you're the one who really intoxicates me. Just take hold of my arm and we'll walk slowly back to Garvey and the helicar—and make the party a complete success."

"Suits me," she said, smiling happily, taking very firm hold of his arm.

They started walking down the stairs, their arms very tightly interlinked.

Alan muttered to himself, "Oh, what a wise old psychologist am I—and what one hell of a party it'll be."

It was.

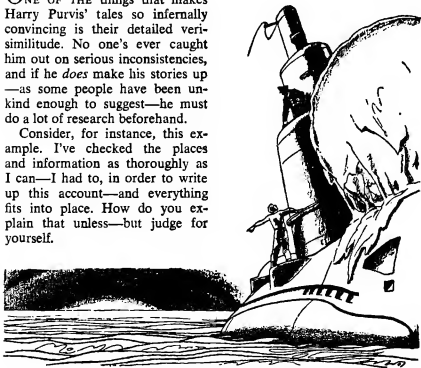
COLD WAR

It was a scientific project worthy of the best minds on Earth. But Florida's indignation wasn't hard to understand!

By ARTHUR C. CLARKE

ONE OF THE things that makes Harry Purvis' tales so infernally convincing is their detailed verisimilitude. No one's ever caught him out on serious inconsistencies, and if he *does* make his stories up—as some people have been unkind enough to suggest—he must do a lot of research beforehand.

Consider, for instance, this example. I've checked the places and information as thoroughly as I can—I had to, in order to write up this account—and everything fits into place. How do you explain that unless—but judge for yourself.



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"I've often noticed," Harry began, "how tantalizing little odds and ends of information appear in the Press and then—sometimes years later—one comes across their sequels. I've just had a beautiful example. In the spring of nineteen fifty-four—I've looked up the date; it was April nineteenth—an iceberg was reported off the coast of Florida. I remember spotting this news item and thinking it highly peculiar.

"The Gulf Stream, you see, is born in the Straits of Florida, and I couldn't understand *how* an iceberg could get that far south before it melted. But I forgot about the whole business almost immediately, thinking it was just another of those tall stories which the papers like to print when there isn't any really important news.

"And then, about a week ago, I met a friend who'd been a Commander in the U.S. Navy, and he told me the whole astonishing tale. It's such a remarkable story that I think it ought to be better known—though I'm sure that a lot of people simply won't believe it.

"Any of you who are familiar with domestic American affairs may know that Florida's claim to be the Sunshine State is strongly disputed by some of the other forty-seven members of the Union. I don't suppose New York or Maine or Connecticut are very serious contenders, but the State of California regards the Florida

claim as an almost personal affront, and is always doing its best to refute it.

"The Floridians hit back by pointing to the famous San Francisco fogs. Then the Californians say, with careful anxiety, 'Isn't it about time you had another hurricane?' and the Floridians reply 'You can count on us when you want any earthquake relief.'

"So it goes on, and this is where my friend Commander Dawson came into the picture.

"The Commander had been in submarines, but was now retired. He'd been working as technical advisor on a film about the exploits of the submarine service when he was approached one day with a very peculiar proposition. I won't say that the California Chamber of Commerce was behind it, as that might constitute libel. You can make your own guesses.

"Anyway, the idea was a typical Hollywood conception. Or so I thought at first. Then I remembered that dear old Lord Dunsany had used a similar theme in one of his short stories. Maybe the Californian sponsor was a Jorkens fan, just as I am.

"The scheme was delightful in its boldness and simplicity. Commander Dawson was offered a substantial sum of money to pilot an artificial iceberg to Florida, with a bonus if he could contrive

to strand it on Miami Beach at the height of the season.

"I need hardly say that the Commander accepted with alacrity: he came from Kansas himself, so could view the whole thing dispassionately as a purely commercial proposition. He got together some of his old crew, swore them to secrecy, and after much waiting in Washington corridors managed to obtain temporary loan of an obsolete submarine. Then he went to a big air-conditioning company, convinced them of his credit and his sanity, and got the ice-making plant installed in a big blister on the sub's deck.

"It would take an impossible amount of power to make a solid iceberg, even a small one, so a compromise became necessary. There would be an outer coating of ice a couple of feet thick, but Frigid Freda, as she was christened, was to be hollow. She would look quite impressive from outside, but would be a typical Hollywood stage set when one got behind the scenes.

"However, nobody would see her inner secrets except the Commander and his men. She would be set adrift when the prevailing winds and currents were in the right direction, and would last long enough to cause the calculated alarm and despondency.

"Of course, there were endless practical problems to be solved. It would take several days of

steady freezing to create Freda, and she must be launched as near her objective as possible. That meant that the submarine—which we'll discreetly call the *Marlin*—would have to use a base not too far from Miami.

"The Florida Keys were considered and at once rejected. There was no privacy down there any more. The fishermen now outnumbered the mosquitoes and a submarine would be spotted almost instantly. Even if the *Marlin* pretended she was merely smuggling, she wouldn't be able to get away with it. So that plan was out.

"There was another problem that the Commander had to consider. The coastal waters around Florida are extremely shallow, and though Freda's draught would only be a couple of feet, everybody knew that an honest-to-goodness iceberg was four-fifths below the waterline. It wouldn't be very realistic to have an impressive-looking berg sailing through two feet of water. That would give the show away at once.

"I don't know exactly how the Commander overcame these technical problems. From what I've been told he carried out several tests in the Atlantic, far from any shipping routes. The iceberg reported in the news was one of his early productions. Incidentally, neither Freda nor her brethren would have been a danger to ship-

ping—being hollow, they would have broken up on impact.

"Finally, all the preparations were complete. The *Marlin* lay out in the Atlantic, some distance north of Miami, with her ice-manufacturing equipment going full blast. It was a beautiful clear night, with a crescent moon sinking in the west. The *Marlin* had no navigation lights, but Commander Dawson was keeping a very strict watch for other ships. On a night like this, he'd be able to avoid them without being spotted himself.

"Freda was still in an embryonic stage. I gather that the technique used was to inflate a large plastic bag with super-cooled air, and spray water over it until a crust of ice formed. The bag could be removed when the ice was thick enough to stand up under its own weight. Ice is not a very good structural material, but there was no need for Freda to be very big. Even a small iceberg would be as disconcerting to the Florida Chamber of Commerce as a small baby to an unmarried mother.

"Commander Dawson was in the conning tower, watching his crew working with their sprays of ice-cold water and jets of freezing air. They were now quite skilled at this unusual occupation, and delighted in little artistic touches. However, the Commander had had to put a stop to attempts to reproduce Marilyn Monroe in ice

—though he filed the idea for future reference.

"Just after midnight he was startled by a sudden flash of light in the northern sky, and turned in time to see a red glow die away on the horizon.

"'There's a plane down, skipper!' shouted one of the lookouts. 'I just saw it crash!'

"Without hesitation, the Commander shouted down to the engine room and set his course to the north. He'd got an accurate fix on the glow, and judged that it couldn't be more than a few miles away. The presence of Freda, covering most of the stern of his vessel, would not affect his speed appreciably, and in any case there was no way of getting rid of her quickly. He stopped the freezers to give more power to the main diesels, and shot ahead at full speed.

"About thirty minutes later the lookout, using powerful night-glasses, spotted something lying in the water. 'It's still afloat,' he said. 'Some kind of airplane all right—but I can't see any sign of life. And I think the wings have come off.'

"He had scarcely finished speaking when there was an urgent report from another watcher.

"'Look, skipper—thirty degrees to starboard! *What's that?*'

"Commander Dawson swung around and whipped up his glasses. He saw, just visible above the

water, a small oval object spinning rapidly on its axis.

"‘Uh-huh,’ he said. ‘I’m afraid we’ve got company. That’s a radar scanner—there’s another sub here.’ Then he brightened considerably. ‘Maybe we can keep out of this after all,’ he remarked to his second in command. ‘We’ll watch to see that they start rescue operations, then sneak away.’

"‘We may have to submerge and abandon Freda. Remember they’ll have spotted us by now on their radar. Better slacken speed and behave more like a real iceberg.’

"Dawson nodded and gave the order. This was getting complicated, and anything might happen in the next few minutes. The other sub would have observed the *Marlin* merely as a blip on its radar screen, but as soon as it upped periscope its commander would start investigating. Then the fat would be in the fire . . .

"Dawson analyzed the tactical situation. The best move, he decided, was to employ his unusual camouflage to the full. He gave the order to swing the *Marlin* around so that her stern pointed towards the still submerged stranger. When the other sub surfaced, her commander would be most surprised to see an iceberg, but Dawson hoped he would be too busy with rescue operations to bother about Freda.

"He pointed his glasses towards

the crashed plane—and then had his second shock. It was a very peculiar type of aircraft indeed, and there was something wrong with it."

"‘Of course!’ said Dawson to his Number One. ‘We should have thought of this. That thing isn’t an airplane at all. It’s a missile from the range over at Cocoa! Look, you can see the floatation bags. They must have inflated on impact, and that sub was waiting out here to take it back.’

"He’d remembered that there was a big missile launching range over on the east coast of Florida, at a place with the unlikely name of Cocoa on the still more improbable Banana River. Well, at least there was nobody in danger, and if the *Marlin* sat tight there was a sporting chance that they’d be none the worse for this diversion.

"Their engines were just ticking over, which meant that they had enough control to keep hiding behind their camouflage. Freda was quite large enough to conceal the conning tower, and from a distance, even in a better light than this, the *Marlin* would be totally invisible. There was one dreadful possibility, though. The other sub might start shelling them on general principles, as a menace to navigation. No: it would just report them by radio to the coast-guards, which would be a nuisance but would not interfere with their plans.

"Here she comes!" said Number One. "What class is she?"

"They both stared through their glasses as the submarine, water pouring from its sides, emerged from the faintly phosphorescent ocean. The moon had now almost set, and it was difficult to make out any details. The radar scanner, Dawson was glad to see, had stopped its rotation and was pointing at the crashed missile. There was something odd about the design of that conning tower, though . . .

"Then Dawson swallowed hard, lifted the mike to his mouth, and whispered to his crew in the bowels of the *Marlin*: 'Does anyone down there speak Russian?'

"There was a long silence, but presently the engineer officer climbed up into the conning tower.

"I know a bit, skipper," he said. "My grandparents came from the Ukraine. What's the trouble?"

"Take a look at this," said Dawson grimly. "There's an interesting piece of poaching going on here. I think we ought to stop it."

Harry Purvis has a most annoying habit of breaking off just when a story reaches its climax, and ordering another beer—or, more usually, getting someone else to buy him one. I've watched him do this so often that now I can tell just when the climax is coming by the level in his glass. We had to wait, with what patience we could, while he refueled.

"When you think about it," he said thoughtfully, "it was jolly hard luck on the commander of that Russian submarine. I imagine they shot him when he got back to Vladivostock, or wherever he came from. For what court of inquiry would have believed his story? If he was fool enough to tell the truth, he'd have said 'We were just off the Florida coast when an iceberg shouted at us in Russian, "Excuse me—I think that's *our* property!"' Since there would be a couple of MVD men aboard the ship, the poor guy would have had to make up *some* kind of story, but whatever he said wouldn't be very convincing . . .

"As Dawson had calculated, the Russian sub simply ran for it as soon as it knew it had been spotted. And remembering that he was an officer on the reserve, and that his duty to his country was more important than his contractual obligations to any single state, the commander of the *Marlin* really had no choice in his subsequent actions. He picked up the missile, defrosted Freda, and set course for Cocoa—first sending a radio message that caused a great flurry in the Navy Department and started destroyers racing out into the Atlantic. Perhaps Inquisitive Ivan never got back to Vladivostock after all!

"The subsequent explanations were a little embarrassing, but the

rescued missile was so important that no one asked too many questions about the *Marlin's* private war. The attack on Miami Beach had to be called off, however, at least until the next season. It's a pleasure to relate that even the sponsors of the project, though they had sunk a lot of money into it, weren't too disappointed. They each have a certificate signed by the Chief of Naval Operations, thanking them for valuable but unspecified services to their country. These cause such envy and mystification to all their Los Angeles friends that they wouldn't part with them for anything . . .

"Yet I don't want you to think that nothing more will ever come

of the whole project. You ought to know American publicity men better than that. Freda may be in suspended animation, but one day she'll be revived. All the plans are ready, down to such little details as the accidental presence of a Hollywood film unit on Miami Beach when Freda comes sailing in from the Atlantic.

"So this is one of those stories I can't round off to a nice, neat ending. The preliminary skirmishes have taken place, but the main engagement is still to come. And this is the part I often wonder about—*what will Florida do to the Californians when it discovers what's going on? Any suggestions, anybody?*"

NEXT ISSUE'S COMPLETE NOVEL

BADGE OF INFAMY

A Story of Martian Madness

by **LESTER DEL REY**



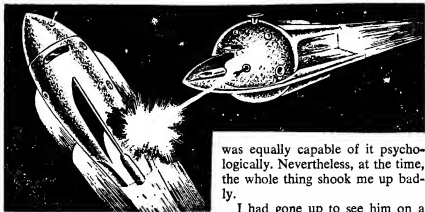
An alien environment can prove shattering to a mind with a too narrow approach to reality—or to a mind too strong to adjust to new ideas. But never had the human mind faced a test like this—and survived.

A Soldier, an Old Man and a Robot meet in a story by

GORDON R. DICKSON

We like to think of the interstellar future as a time of strange and wonderful new problems. But some problems are always with us.

ACT OF CREATION



NOW THAT I HAVE had time to think it over, the quite common-sense explanation occurs to me that old Jonas Wellman must have added an extra, peculiar circuit to cause the one unusual response. He was quite capable of it, of course—technically, that is. And I don't know but what he

was equally capable of it psychologically. Nevertheless, at the time, the whole thing shook me up badly.

I had gone up to see him on a traditionally unpleasant duty. His son, Alvin, had been in my outfit at the time of Flander's Charge, off the Vegan Warhold. The boy was liaison officer from the Earth Draft, and he went with the aft gun platform, the Communications Dorsai Regulars, when we got pinched between a light cruiser and one those rearmed freighters

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the Vegans filled their assault line with.

The cruiser stood off at a little under a thousand kilometers and boxed us with her light guns. While we were occupied, the freighter came up out of the sun and hit us with a CO beam, before we caught her in our laterals and blew her to bits. It was their CO beam that did for Alvin and the rest.

At any rate, Alvin had been on loan to us, so to speak, and, as commanding officer, I owed a duty-call to his surviving relatives. At that time, I hadn't connected his last name—Wellman—with Jonas Wellman. Even if I had, I would have had to think a long minute before remembering just who Jonas Wellman was.

Most people, using robots nowadays, never heard of him. Of course, I had, because we Dorsai mercenaries were the first to use them in combat. When I did make the connection, I remember it struck me as rather odd, because I had never heard Alvin mention his father.

I had duty time-off after that—and, since we were in First Quadrant area, I shuttled to Arcturus and took the short hop to Sol. I had never been on the home world before and I was rather interested to see what Earth looked like. As usual, with such things, it was somewhat of a disappointment. It's a small world, anyway, and,

since it lost its standing as a commercial power, a lot of the old city areas have been grubbed up and turned into residential districts.

In fact, the planet is hardly more than one vast suburb, nowadays. I was told that there's a movement under way to restore some of the old districts as historical shrines, but they'd need Outsystem funds for that, and I can't, myself, see many of the large powers sparing an appropriation at the present time.

Still, there's something about the planet. You can't forget that this was where we all started. I landed in the South Pacific, and took a commuter's rocket to the Mojave. From there, I put in a call to Jonas Wellman, who lived someplace north and west of the mountain range there—I forget the name of it. He was pleased to hear from me, and invited me up immediately.

I located one of these little automatic taxi-ships, and we puttered north by northwest for about half an hour and finally sat down in a small parking area in the Oregon woods. There was nothing there but the glassy rectangle of the area itself, plus an automatic call station for the taxis. A few people were waiting around for their ships to arrive, and, as I sat down, what looked like an A-5 robot came across the field to meet me.

When he got close, I saw he wasn't an A-5, but something similar—Possibly something a bit special that Jonas had designed for himself.

"Commandant Jiel?" he asked.

"That's right," I said.

I followed him across the parking area, toward a private hopper. The few people we passed on the way turned their backs as we passed, with a deliberateness and uniformity that was too pointed to be accidental. For a moment, it occurred to me that I might be the cause of their reaction—certain creeds and certain peoples, which have experienced wars, have no use for the mercenary soldier.

But this was the home world nobody would think of attacking, even if they had a reason for doing so, which, of course, Earth will never be able to give them, as long as the large powers exist.

Belatedly, it occurred to me that the robot with me might be the cause. I turned to look at him. An A-5—particularly an A-5—is built to resemble the human form. This was, as I have said, a refined model. I mulled the matter over, trying to phrase the question, so I could get information out of the mechanical.

"Are there Anti-R's in the community here?" I asked finally.

"Yes sir," he said.

Well, that explained it. The AR's are, in general, folk with

an unpleasant emotional reaction to robots. They are psychopathic in my opinion, and in that of any man who has used robots commercially or for military purposes. They find robots resembling the human form—particularly the A-5 model and the rest of the A-series—*obscene, disgusting* and so-forth. Some worlds which have experienced wars are almost completely AR.

I didn't, however, expect to find it on Earth, especially so close to the home of Jonas Wellman. Still, a prophet in his own country, or however the old saying goes.

We took a ground car, which the robot drove, and, eventually, reached a curious anachronism of a house, set off in the woods by itself. It was a long, rambling structure, made in frame of native stone and wood, the only civilized thing about it being vibratory weather-screens between the pillars of the frame, to keep out the rain and wind.

It had a strange aura about it, as if it were a dwelling place, old not so much in years as in memories, as if something about it went back to the very dawn of the race. The rain and the falling night, as we approached it, heightened this illusion so that the tall pines, clustered closely about house and lawn, seemed almost primeval, seemed to enclose us in an ancestral past.

Yet, the house itself was cheerful. Its lighting was inlaid in the archaic framing, and it glowed internally, with a subdued, casual illumination that did not dim the flames in a wide, central fireplace. Real flames from actual burning wood—not an illusion! It touched me, somehow. Few people, unless they have seen the real article, appreciate the difference between the actual flames of a real fire, and those of an illusion.

I, who have experienced the reality, on strange planets, or a need for warmth and light, know the difference very well. It is a subjective reaction, not easily put into words. Perhaps, if you will forgive my training to be fanciful, who am not a fanciful man, it's this—there are stories in the real flames. I know it can mean nothing to those of you who have never seen it but—try it for yourself, sometime.

Jonas Wellman, himself, came forward to meet me, when we stepped through the front screen lens. He was a short, slim man, a little bent about the shoulders, who had let his hair go completely white. He had a gnome's face, all wrinkled, sad and merry in the same instant. He came forward and held out his hand.

"Commandant Jeil," he said.

His voice was as warm as the hissing flames of his fireplace. I took his hand without hesitation,

for I am no hater of old traditions.

"Good of you to come," he said. "Sorry about the rain. The district requires it for our trees, and we like our trees around here."

He turned and led the way to a little conversation-area. The robot glided on silent feet behind us, towering over both of us. Though I have the hereditary Dorsai height, the A-5 run to a two-and-a-quarter-meter length, which is possibly one of the reasons the AR dislike them so.

"Sit down, Commandant, sit down, please," Jonas said. "Adam, would you bring us some drinks, please? What would you like, Commandant?"

"Plain ethyl and water, thanks," I said. "It's what we get used to on duty."

He smiled at me in the light of the fire, which was dancing to our right and throwing ruddy lights on his time-marked face.

"Whatever is your pleasure," he said.

The robot brought the glasses. Jonas was drinking something also colorless. I remember I meant to ask him what it was, but never got around to doing so. Instead, I asked him about the robot.

"Adam?" I said.

Jonas chuckled.

"He was to be the first of a new series," he answered.

"I didn't mean that," I said. "I meant your naming him at all.

Very few people do, nowadays."

"The vogue has passed," he said. "But I've had him for a long time, and I live alone here." The last words reminded us both of my errand, and he stopped rather abruptly. He hurried back into conversation, to bridge the gap. "I suppose you know about my connection with robotics and robots?"

"We used them on Kemelman for land scouts, first, eighty years or so back."

"That's right," he said, his gnome's face saddening a little. "I'd forgotten."

"They were very successful."

"I suppose they were—militarily." He looked squarely at me, suddenly. "No offense to you Dor-sai, Commandant, but I was not in favor of military use of my robots. Only—the decision was taken out of my hands. I lost control of the manufacturing and licensing rights early."

"No offense," I said, but I looked at him curiously. "I didn't know that."

"Oh, yes," he said. "It was a little too big for one man, anyway. First the Earth Council grabbed it, then the Solar Commission. Then it went out in all directions, with every system grabbing a chunk and setting up their own manufactories and regulators."

"I'm sorry to hear that," I said.

"Don't be." He shook his head, sticking out his lower lip like some-

one deprecating something already so small as to be beneath notice. "It was probably inevitable. Then, I think my robots have done more harm than good in the long run, no matter what's been accomplished with them." He shook his head again, smiling. "Not that I was always so resigned to the situation."

"No?"

"No—I had my dreams, when I was younger. To build a better universe, to better people—I was an idealist."

"An idealist?" I repeated. "I don't know the word."

"It's an old one," he answered. "Almost lost its meaning, now. It means—well, that you have a very high opinion of the human race, or people. That you expect the best of them, and want the best *for* them."

I laughed. "It sounds like being in love with everyone at once."

He nodded, smiling.

"Something like that, Commandant—perhaps not so violent. Tone it down a little and call it being fond of people. I'm a fond sort of person, I suppose. I've been fond of a great many things. Of people, of my robots, of my first wife, of . . ." his voice trailed off and he looked into the firelight. He sighed. "Perhaps," he added, "you'd better tell me about my son, now, Commandant."

I told him briefly. It is always best that way. Make it like a news

report, impersonal, then sit back for the questions. There are always the questions.

Jonas Wellman was no different. He sat a little longer than most, after I had finished, staring into the fire, but he came to it at last.

"Commandant," he said, "What did you think of Alvin?"

"Why," I told him, "I didn't know him too well, you know. He was liaison officer from another outfit—almost a visitor aboard our ship. We had different customs, and he kept pretty much to himself." I stopped, but, when I saw him still waiting, I had to go on. "He was very quiet, a good sort of officer, not self-conscious with us Dorsai, the way a lot of outsiders are . . ."

I talked on, trying to bring my memory of Alvin Wellman back into focus, but it was not too good. You try to remember the best on these occasions, to forget the worst. The truth was, there was very little to remember. Young Wellman had been like a ghost among us. The only clear memory I could bring to mind was of his sitting back in his corner of the table at mess, his pale young features withdrawn from the place and the technical conversation that went on among the rest of us.

"He was a good man," I wound up finally. "We all liked him."

"Yes," the old man lifted his

face from the flames. "He was drafted, you know."

"Oh?" I said—although, of course, I had known it perfectly well. It was why we had called the Solar Contingent the Earth Draft among ourselves. None of them had any real stake in the war, and few had wanted to come. It was Arcturus' doing, as everybody knew. The home system is under Arcturus' thumb, and probably always will be. But you don't tell that to an old man who has lost his only son in a war resulting from such a situation.

"His mother never wanted him to go—but there was no choice." Jonas picked up his drink, sipped it, as an old man will, then, put it down again. But his voice was a little stronger when he went on.

"His mother was my second wife, you know. We separated when Alvin was six. That was—that was . . ." his voice took on a fretful note. For the first time a true note of his age rang through it. "When was that, Adam?"

"Eighteen years ago," said the robot suddenly, startling me. I had almost forgotten that he was still with us. His voice, coming unexpectedly out of the fire-cast shadows behind us, made me start.

"Oh, yes—yes. Eighteen years ago," said Jonas, with a sigh of pleasure and relief. He looked over at me with something that was almost like shyness. "Adam is my memory," he said. "Everything

that I forget, he remembers—everything! Tell the Commandant what the house was like, then, Adam."

"It was as it is now," said the robot. "The lawn was the same, except that we had a bed of roses along the south edge."

"Ah, yes—those roses," said Jonas, nodding. "Alvin was very fond of those roses. Even as a baby—even when he stuck himself with the thorns."

"Did they have thorns?" I asked, surprised.

"Yes," he answered. "Yes, indeed. I'm very old-fashioned in some ways, Commandant, as you can tell by this house. Something in me has always yearned toward the past. That's why I like it here, with the trees all around me and the mountains standing over and behind them, unchanging, year after year."

"And you were the man who came up with the first practical humanoid robots," I said.

"Why should that surprise you?" He looked at me almost wonderingly. "I didn't intend them to lead us farther away from old virtues, but back to them again."

I shook my head. "I don't see how," I said.

"Why, I wanted to set people free," he said. "I wanted to unite their hands, and their minds. The average man is essentially good, Commandant. A hundred and

forty years of life have never changed my mind about that. He wants to be fond of his fellow-man and will, given half a chance."

I shook my head again, but without saying anything. I did not want to argue with him.

"Love is life," he said, "and life is love. All the accidents in the world can't prove that false. Did the accident that took my first wife's life prove that I didn't love her when she was alive? Did the accidental combination of political powers, that took my robots from me, negate the love for people that caused me to create those robots in the first place?

"Did the accident that my second wife never really loved me deny the life that was given to Alvin, or my love for him, or his for me—before she took him away? I tell you, he loved me as a baby—didn't he, Adam?"

"He loved you, Jason."

"And I was very fond of him. I was already an old man then. I didn't remarry for many, many, years, after my first—my Elaine—died. I thought I would never marry again. But then *she* came along—and she gave me Alvin. But then she took him away again, for no good reason, except that she knew I was fond of him, and wanted him. She was very bitter against me for not having what she believed I had when she married me." He paused.

"Money," said the robot quietly.

"Yes, money. She thought I still controlled some part of the robot franchise, here in the system, that no one knew about. She was too cautious, too clever, to check fully before she married me. After we were married, it was too late.

"She tried to make a go of it, though, which is much more than another woman might have done in her place. She gave me Alvin. But she had never really liked me, and her dislike grew worse and worse, until she couldn't stand it. So she left me, and took him."

He stopped. The fire flickered on the pillars of the house.

"That's too bad," I said awkwardly. "Is—*is* she still alive?"

"No." He said it abruptly. "She died shortly after Alvin was drafted. I went to see her, but she wouldn't see me. And so, she died. It was then I learned that Alvin was gone. She hadn't told me about the draft."

"I see," I said.

"I was fond of her, too—still," he went on. "But it hurt me that I had not been able to see my son, before he went off to die, so many millions and millions of miles away. If she had left him with me as a boy, I would have taught him to love people, to love everything as I myself have. Perhaps he would have been a success, where I have been a failure." He flung up his head and turned suddenly to the robot.

"Adam, I've been a failure!" he cried.

"No," said the robot.

The old man heaved a heavy sigh. Slowly, the tension leaked out of him, and he slumped back in his chair. His eyes were abstracted, and on the fire.

"No," I said. "In my opinion, you're no failure, Mr. Wellman. You have to judge success or failure by concrete things. You set out to give robots to people, and you did. That's the one big accomplishment of your life."

"No." He shook his head, his eyes still locked in the heart of the fire. "Love is life. Love should create life to some good purposeful end. I poured out my love, and all I created came to a dead end. Not the theory, but I fell down. I have Adam tell me that I didn't—but this is the sort of soothing syrup an old man feeds himself. Well . . ."

He roused himself. He looked at me and I was surprised at the change in Wellman's face. The sad and merry lines were all fallen into the still mask of great age. It was a face which sees at once the empty future and the lid of the coffin closing soon upon it.

"I get tired quickly nowadays," he said. "If you'll forgive me, Commandant, I'll have Adam take you back to the taxi-area. Thank you for coming this long distance to tell me about Alvin."

He held out his hand. I took it

briefly, and stood up. "It's nothing," I said. "We mercenaries spend our lives in moving from one place to another. I was close as star-distances go. Goodby, Mr. Wellman."

He looked up at me from the depths of his chair. "One thing, Commandant," he said. "Just one more thing—were people fond—did the men on your ship really like Alvin?"

"Why . . ." I said, fumbling, for the truth was that none of us had known the young man well enough to like or dislike him—and the question had caught me off balance. "Why—they liked him well enough."

The old man sagged. "Yes," he said. His downcast eyes, as if drawn by some force greater than the life within him, wandered back to the fire. "Well, thank you again, Commandant."

"It was nothing. Goodby," I said.

I offered my hand again, but he did not see it. He was seated staring into the flames, seeing something I could not imagine. I left him that way.

Outside, the robot opened the door of the ground car for me and slid behind the controls himself. The rain had stopped falling, but the night was heavy and dark. We moved silently down the road, man and mechanical, behind a little yellow pool of light, dancing before us from the headlights.

For some time, I sat without saying anything, thinking to myself of odd things the old man's words had somehow conjured up within me—memories of the Dorsai Worlds, of Hevflum, my planet, of the cobalt seas beside our home in Tunisport, of the women of our family—of my grandfather, probably dead by now. What I thought about them, I don't know. I only know that I *did* think of them, one after the other, like a man counting over his possessions.

I roused myself at last, to become conscious of the robot beside me. We were almost at the parking-area, and I could make out my waiting taxi, parked off to one side in the shadows.

"Over there," I directed the robot.

"Yes, sir," he said.

He turned the ground-car a trifle in that direction, and we rolled up beside the taxi. He got out, went around to open the door on my side of the car and let me out. I stepped from floor cushion to the glassy surface of the area and looked at the tall, black-metal body of the robot, a full head above me in height.

"Adam . . ." I said.

"Sir?"

But I found I had no words for what seemed to be inside me.

"Nothing," I said.

I stepped up to the entrance of the taxi, closed the door behind me and moved forward, into the

pilot's seat. Out through the window beside me, I could see Adam standing silently, his head now at last a little below mine. I started the engine, then, on sudden impulse, throttled back to idling-power and set the window down. I leaned out of it.

"Adam, come here," I ordered.

The robot took two steps forward, so that he was standing just below the window.

"When you get back to Mr. Wellman," I said. "Give him the following message from me. Say that—that . . ."

But it was no use. There was still nothing for me to say. I wanted, with a strange desperation, to send some word to Jonas Wellman, to prove to him that he was not alone in the world, that his love had not failed in its task of

creation as we both knew it had. But what could I say in the face of the facts?

"Never mind. *Cancel!*" I said angrily, and turned away, reaching for the throttle. But, just as my hand touched it, the robot's voice drew me back to the window.

"Commandant," it said.

I turned and looked out. The robot had taken a step nearer, and, as I looked, his head swiveled back on its smooth bearings, his face raised to mine. I remember the twin dull gleam of his red eye-lens scanners coming up to me in the shadowy dimness, like two embers in a fire uncovered by a breath and glowing into sudden life.

"Rest easy, Commandant," he said. "I love him."



SATELLITE

"The Magazine that is a Book!"

WELCOME, STRANGER

It was only a routine mission for Rel—but Earth's future hung upon his findings. So it was lucky for us he found only monsters!

by ROBERT BLOCH

REL LEFT THE mother-ship, shortly after the sun rose. It hovered only a dozen miles or so above the surface of the planet, scarcely beyond the range of visibility from below. There it would remain, until he returned at dusk.

Now he floated down in the little carrier, a bit giddy at first, as all four of his lungs gasped for oxygen in the thin atmosphere. When he neared the green surface below, he breathed more easily.

It was going to be all right, he told himself. There was nothing to fear. This was only a routine assignment after all, and not a very important one. If it had been important, Rel wouldn't have been chosen to carry it out. But this job was quite simple.

The planet he was approaching had been under careful observation for years. Others, much more



skilful and intelligent than Rel, had landed here in the past. They had come away with data—data in the form of writings and recordings. The material was crude, as was to be expected from a primitive culture, but sufficient.

From it, Rel's people had learned all they needed to know. Apparently, there was no uni-

formity of culture here, and, for a time, Rel and his superiors were uncertain as to which group was dominant, which language to learn, which pattern of behavior to assimilate.

Repeated study and frequent visits finally gave them the necessary answer. Scout carriers, skimming above the land-surfaces again and again, corroborated their findings.

The most advanced group of mammals calling themselves men inhabited a large land-mass, bordered on two sides by great bodies of water. Known as the United States of America, its heartland was the Midwest. Here were cities, heavily-populated areas.

It was to one of these cities that Rel must go. A simple assignment, really—his Krala had outlined the situation quite logically.

"You have had the necessary training," the Krala told him. "You have learned the language—English. You have read the writings, listened to the recordings. Your briefing has been thorough, and you needn't anticipate any difficulty in passing as a man during a brief stay.

"As for outward appearance, that is no problem. Your skin can be bleached. A hair-covering has been prepared for your skull. We have acquired typical garments for you to wear, including clothing for the feet, called shoes,

which will hide the webs. You will look like a man, talk like a man, act like a man. The rest is merely a matter of observation."

The Krala was right, of course. When Rel saw how he looked in disguise, he marveled.

"It's not so surprising, really," the Krala commented. "After all, there are many similarities between us and the inhabitants of this planet—just as the planet itself closely resembles our own. Atmospherically, organically, the resemblance is remarkable. The gravitational aspect is almost identical. That is why we are interested, of course. It's only a tiny place, and hardly important, but, perhaps, we might find use for it as a colony."

"I am to spend a day in observation," Rel said. "Is there any specific data I must acquire? Should I assess the physical and psychic potential, seek to discover what weapons these mammals possess?"

The Krala went orange in mirth. "Hardly! This is not an espionage assignment—we are already fully aware of the technology. It is crude—these mammals still deal with energy in terms of explosion and implosion. Intelligence-wise they are retarded. No, taking over the planet by force does not constitute a problem at all. Your task is merely to render an opinion as to whether it's worth the effort."

"But you say you have learned conditions are ideal. Gravitation, temperature, oxygen-content are satisfactory. Natural resources are abundant. There is food, water, everything our people use to sustain life. Isn't that worthwhile enough?"

The Krala pinkened questioningly. "I speak now in kinetic terms. You know our policy in regard to colonization. A conquest by force entails far too great an expenditure of time and effort. The energy necessary to subdue aliens and rule over them is generally a waste.

Therefore, we have always approached a new planet with a view towards infiltration. If we find that the living-habits are congenial, we gradually dispatch our people. They melt into the existing population slowly, and in a generation or so, their numerical domination is complete. Only then do we reveal ourselves.

"Usually, by that time, our people have attained key positions of control, so that it is possible to conquer from within. Less effort is entailed. The less effort expended, the greater the life-force preserved. That's fundamental."

Rel listened, yellowing with comprehension beneath his bleach. "Then I am merely to observe if the present living-habits of these mammals would be congenial to our people?"

"Exactly—you are to spend a

typical day as a typical human, or American—whatever the term is. Mingle with others. Take care that you're not detected, of course, but mingle. Eat and drink. Check your reactions carefully. Determine, if you can, what life would be like here for our people, during the time they'd spend in disguise. You will be the one to decide."

Rel felt himself glowing redly, but the Krala's final words dimmed him immediately.

"It's nothing to get scarlet about," the Krala said snappishly. "As I told you, the decision really isn't of any great importance. There are thousands of such worlds. If it were a vital matter, we wouldn't select you for the task. We'd send down many trained observers, instead of mere fledglings.

"But we haven't the time or energy to waste. So we selected you—just an average specimen—because your reactions will approximate those of the average specimens who might conceivably infiltrate here. We're willing to abide by your opinion. Now go to your Bezster for final briefing."

Rel had gone to his Bezster, and the details were arranged. The day chosen was one during which the mammals did no labor, but congregated in park areas for recreation. Therefore Rel could wander about freely, without having to leave the park, and still be

assured of ample opportunity to mingle with mammals at a minimum risk to himself.

"But the carrier," Rel protested. "It will be observed, just as others have been in the past. Some of our data mentions such sightings—flying saucers, isn't that the term?"

He was reassured on that score immediately. The carrier would be undetected at dawn of a recreation-day, or Sunday, as it was called. Nobody came to park areas that early. From previous scouting-trips, a place had been discovered, where he could conceal the carrier during the time he spent in the park.

So it came to pass that, shortly before 8 a.m., on the morning of Sunday, June 3rd, Rel landed his carrier in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, at Washington Park Zoo.

He had noted the location of the caves very carefully as he descended, and steered the carrier until he hovered above the walled-off row. Selecting a center section, he dropped quietly and landed the vessel on an open stone surface, midway between a cave and the metal bars beyond.

The park was deserted. No men-figures were visible in any direction. Rel congratulated himself as he quickly dragged the light carrier toward the mouth of the cave. It was quiet and peaceful here. He had to restrain himself from orangeng under his

bleach, as he thought of the welcome he would get if his coming were anticipated by men. Instead of slipping down unnoticed, there would be a reception committee, and . . .

The reception committee was awaiting him at the mouth of the cave. It was big and white, and it had four legs, armed with sharp claws, and a red throat, bordered by yellow fangs. It rose on its hind legs and roared, and Rel blackened with fear.

Instinctively, he crouched behind the carrier, shoving it forward and keeping it between himself and the white creature. The thing began to claw at the carrier—Rel wasn't alarmed, because the vessel was indestructible. He shoved the carrier into the cave, the creature retreating behind it. But the carrier didn't prove to be a sufficient obstacle, once it had passed the mouth. The white monster could burrow around the side and emerge. Roaring again, it did so.

Rel turned and fled. The great roaring beast lumbered after him. He ran toward the metal bars, hoping to vault them and escape to the park area beyond. The creature was right behind him, and he knew its paws were lifted to rake and rend. He leaped for the bars—and the ground fell out from under him.

Rel hadn't noticed the moat. He landed with a thud. The

white horror growled down at him from the edge, but made no effort to follow. Slowly and painfully Rel got to his feet. He began to climb up the bars.

Now roars resounded from the caves on either side. The open spaces before them were suddenly filled with more monsters—black ones, grey ones and immense brown ones that walked on two legs and howled fearfully. Rel inched his way up to the top of the bars—and the metal spikes dug into his chest.

He almost fell then, but managed to hook his legs over the projections. The bottom part of his garments tore on the sharp points. He jumped to the grass on the far side and lay there, panting, for a moment.

Then he rose and staggered away, until the roaring was faint in the distance behind him.

He walked through the park, his four lungs slowing to a point where they resumed their normal function. He came to a narrow black strip, running between two sections of grass, and began to cross it.

There was a deafening sound, and an enormous, clumsy, mechanical vehicle, moving on wheels, rushed past him. Its gleaming snout missed striking his waist by a matter of inches. "Hey, whyinell doncha look where yer goin'?" a voice from within shouted.

Rel reached the safety of the grass beyond and ran away. He came to a large open area, where the grass was thin, and halted at its edge. There was no way of telling what function this space was intended for—best not to attempt crossing it. Besides, he had expended enough effort already. He decided to lie down and rest.

How long he rested he had no idea. The sun was already high when he opened his eyes once more, aroused by the sound of shrill shouts.

A large group of mammals now occupied the open area before him. They seemed smaller, somehow, than he'd expected. Then he realized why—they were the progeny, the immature offspring. More than a dozen of them milled around the field—some clustered at one end, where one of their number wielded a club, the rest taking up apparently arbitrary position at a greater distance.

In the center, a young mammal hurled a round weapon at the mammal holding the club. This mammal did not dodge, but attempted to strike down the weapon with his stick.

The rest of them yelled.

It was, Rel realized, some sort of a game.

From time to time, the creature with the club succeeded in hitting the round weapon, whereupon he ran furiously from man to man

in the field. Then all of the mammals yelled.

Rel ventured closer, observing. It was indeed a game of sorts—a primitive, meaningless game, but a harmless one. And it required a certain degree of co-ordination and dexterity to hurl the round weapon, strike it, run. Others in the field caught the weapon and tossed it back and forth.

"Mister—get out of the way!"

One of the mammals was yelling, apparently at him. Rel smiled to acknowledge the greeting, looked up, blinked, and was hit in the head by the round weapon . . .

He must have been stumbling for hours in a daze. The park was full of people now, happy and carefree in the midst of nightmare. For nightmare it was—to Rel, at any rate.

The beings were everywhere. They raced along the narrow strips in their huge machines—automobiles, Rel now remembered. He had heard of them. But he hadn't learned about the smaller, even noisier and more dangerous, vehicles with two wheels, which darted between them, roaring like the beasts of the caves.

He hadn't learned about the other two-wheeled vehicles that made no noise. These traveled along the grass, propelled by young mammals and several

times Rel was almost knocked down by them. He could, however, avoid the four-wheeled quiet vehicles, which were pushed by females.

These moved slowly. Each contained an object which was not quiet, however—an object that made an appalling outcry. Rel managed to catch a glimpse of the noisemakers and saw that they were the redfaced spawn of this race. Their racket was hideous, and often they had an acrid, unpleasant odor. Why the adult mammals gazed at them so proudly he didn't know.

Nor did he know why the mammals—male and female alike—gazed proudly or fondly at one another. Granted their appearance was not altogether hideous, the majority were far from handsome. As he had been warned, some of the males inhaled nauseating stench from tiny tubes held in their mouths. This was called "smoking".

Many males, as well as many females, wore curious transparent shields before their eyes—again, as he had been informed, for their own pleasure. Apparently, these shields increased their faulty powers of vision.

Rel's highly developed aesthetic faculties were repelled by the men with the tubes and the females with the shields. When, behind the bushes at a corner of the park, he beheld a man put

down his tube and embrace a female wearing a shield, he felt a wave of almost intolerable disgust. Apparently, incredibly, the two were mating!

Rel moved away. It was already afternoon. His legs ached, his webs were sore in the confining foot-garments. The heat was intolerable. And his stomachs were empty.

He looked for a vacant space. There, under the trees, were benches and tables. Large groups of mixed mammals congregated here, making loud noises. But there was a vacant seating-place.

Rel rested, watching the table at his left where several old mammals and a group of young ones were obviously feeding.

The oldest male looked up and noticed him. "Hey, mister!" he called. "You hungry, maybe?"

Rel recognized the word. It had to do with food. He was tempted. Besides, it was his duty to mingle, wasn't it? He nodded.

"So come by us—we got plenty left over here. Mamma, give the mister a plate."

Rel accepted the paper plate, and the elderly female heaped it with food.

"Go ahead, eat up," urged the old male. "Sauerkraut and Polish sausage. Also gives bratwurst. You like bratwurst?"

Rel took the implements he was handed. Knife and fork—he

knew about them had studied their use. The food was hot.

"What's your name, Mister?"

Rel blinked and gulped before replying. He had selected a name, or, rather, the Krala had selected one for him.

"John Smith," he said.

"Schmidt, huh? I'm Rudy Krauss." A huge hand gripped Rel's—gripped and squeezed painfully. "From Third and Burleigh is where we live. You know, where the bus bends?"

Rudy Krauss beamed at him. "Here, how about a beer?" He laughed thunderously. "I'm a little schnozzled up, you know, all day I been at it, and we gotta drink it up. Come on, you help."

Rel was thirsty. He drank, coughed, drank again. Rudy Krauss refilled the glass. He went on talking, and, apparently, all Rel had to do was nod—nod and drink, nod and drink.

Everything blurred. It was getting dark now, but the blurriness was more than twilight. When he stood up, Rel found that he was wobbling.

He had to stand up because the kids wanted him to. The young mammals were called kids, he discovered. Butch and Jeanie insisted that he go with them to the playground, whatever that was, and push them on the swings.

"Sure, he'll make a push for you, ain't so?" Rudy Krauss boomed. "Here, before you go,

drink up. The beer is almost all."

So he drank again, and then they were leading him over to the metal tangle, and they sat in something suspended by metal chains, and he was pushing, and they were going away and coming back, and Butch bumped into his stomachs and he had to sit down. So now he was sitting in one of the things, and they pushed him, back and forth, higher and higher, and everything was blurry and going around and around.

He thought he was going to die before they stopped. It was quite dark now and people were leaving, and he ran away toward the caves. Climbing over the metal bars was torture, and, again, he forgot about the moat and fell into it. Again, the white monster growled and waited, but Rel dodged it somehow and reached the carrier, wheeling it out safely.

Then, miraculously, he was back at the mother-ship and the Krala was greening at him.

"Look at you!" he said, lividly. "Scratches, bruises, torn garments! What happened, were you in physical combat?"

"No," Rel answered, greyly. "I was enjoying myself—the way men do. We were wrong about them. They're monsters. They keep ferocious pets for their amusement, they allow their young to hurl weapons at one another, their social and sexual habits are intolerable. We could

never learn the language properly—the specimen who spoke to me sounded entirely different from the recordings we have heard."

The Krala meditated. "Those difficulties can be overcome with proper training," he decided. "I'm interested in the fundamentals of survival. What would we find for food and drink?"

"Food and drink?" Rel wobbled and colored kaleidoscopically beneath his ravaged bleach. He spoke slowly and painfully. "Their beverage is called beer. It swells the head and the stomachs and distorts vision. Their nourishment is called pickles, and bratwurst, and Polish sausage, and salami, and potato salad, and knackwurst, and sauerkraut and—"

Suddenly Rel was transparent—then he was very, very sick.

The Krala nodded. "Very well," he murmured. "You have brought me the answer. Obviously, we cannot adapt."

MANY LIGHT-YEARS behind, on the planet Earth, by Third and Burleigh, Rudy Krauss rested in bed. It had been a nice picnic, he decided. And that stranger, that young feller, he was nice, too. He seemed to like Mamma's cooking and the good beer.

So thinking, the saviour of the planet turned on his side, belched appreciatively and went to sleep.

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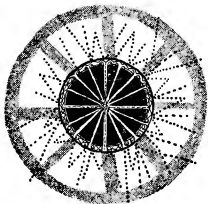
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SSF 14

THE WHEEL

*Unquestionably, Peter saw something—but
a fishbowl was no evidence for sainthood!*

by STEPHEN BARR



BARON NIGEL WAS irritated, as well as uneasy. He disliked presiding at trials and hearings and other formalities, particularly if they had to do with religious matters. Theology was a subject he did not understand—he accepted it on faith.

"Wasn't that," he asked the Abbot, "what you were supposed to do? Properly, it was up to the

Church to attend to such things."

"What you fail to understand, my dear boy," the Abbot replied, "is that this involves the whole village—your fief, in other words. If we try to conduct this affair purely as a church matter it will make everybody nervous—they'll think it's a trial for heresy. Your presence will calm them—they have a high regard for you."

"You are too kind, Abbot." The baron bowed.

"No—merely precise. They trust you—you treat them as companions rather than as inferiors. It's like the old days."

"I expect I'm too easy-going."

"No—merely old-fashioned. As I say, this man Peter claims that he has seen Ezekiel's Wheel. Now, while I'm perfectly ready to admit that such things may appear in one's sleep, they are usually only seen when awake by saints and drunkards, and the trouble is that Peter is not a drunkard."

© 1957, by Stephen Barr

"Well, he's getting rather old, Abbot."

"That's not the point. He insists that he should be a saint, and he's got most of the village with him—but that simply won't do. A saint in a small place like this!" The Abbot's eyes fastened themselves through the open window on a man shearing his one sheep. "I can just imagine what the Bishop would say."

He nodded to Baron Nigel, to indicate that they agreed, and that the conference was over. "I shall sit with you," he added. "Brother Godfrey will represent the Church."

Baron Nigel cringed inwardly—but, after all, why *not* Brother Godfrey? He liked him, and yet he dreaded the spate of ingenious phrases, the intellectual twistings and turnings, the thou-shalt-nots. Brother Godfrey was exactly six years older than the Baron, but he, too, called him "My dear boy."

The hearing was held in Baron Nigel's dining hall, so as to be official, yet unecclesiastical. Nigel and the Abbot sat at the head of the long trestle-board, with Brother Godfrey next to the Abbot, and old Peter and his supporters next to Nigel. These were all of the village, or at least as many of them as could get into the hall. On the other, or ecclesiastical, side were two eager-looking protégés of Brother Godfrey, one yet a novice, the other a young man in black

from Winchester. Probably a tithe officer, thought Nigel.

"Will you open?" said the Abbot to Nigel, "or shall I?"

"I'd much rather you would," the Baron replied.

The Abbot raised his eyelids. This had the effect of a gavel, and there was silence, because his eyes were a pale, distant blue, and they were usually closed.

"I think that . . ." he began, but Brother Godfrey anticipated him. He had, in fact, never been quite in his seat.

"I am sure," he said, "that the Abbot thanks you for coming together here, but we are faced with a Lie!" His small eyes swept the company, finally coming to rest on the ruddy face of the Baron, who blinked his blond eyelashes. "A Lie so dreadful as to shame Ananias!"

Nigel glanced at the Abbot, but the Abbot, as usual, had closed his eyes again.

"Now I would be willing to allow," Brother Godfrey went on, "that this was an honest mistake—the vagary of an old man—but this man Peter insists, not only that it is true, but that it does him honor! My Lord Abbot, he tells us that on last Friday, at seven in the evening, he was in the old croft, and saw Ezekiel's Wheel!

"And more—he says—nay, he insists—that, for this so-called apparition, he should become a saint!" Brother Godfrey sat down,

and there was a murmur of assent from the villagers—frowns and head-shakings from the young protégés.

The Abbot opened his eyes again. "Before we hear what you have to tell us, Peter," he said, "I want you to understand that the point at issue here is this matter of sainthood—not whether you saw or did not see what you think was Ezekiel's Wheel.

"The process of canonization is more complicated than you perhaps realize, and, even if I were to agree to your candidacy, which I do not, the Bishop would be scandalized. It is a process that takes many years, and many intermediate stages, and we should all look like fools for suggesting it. For one thing, you do not become a saint during your own lifetime."

"But, Milord Abbot," Peter said respectfully, "was not Saint Swithin so regarded, even in his youth? And did not Saint Gover become a saint, as soon as his well run with barley-water?"

"These were mere customary appellations," the Abbot said firmly, "local and honorary titles of respect."

"Besides," put in Brother Godfrey severely, "the very existence of these saints is not official. Neither is your unsupported claim—your vision. You have no shred of evidence."

"Oh, but I have, Father!" said old Peter. He produced a cloth bag

from which he took a round glass object, ten inches across and hollow like a fishbowl. "I found this after the bracken stopped burning, and . . ."

Brother Godfrey interrupted him with a snort of disbelief. "The flames," he said, "were set by a fire lighted by some outlaws! The fields are very dry!"

"No one has seen the outlaws," said Peter, "or made report of them."

"I think," said the Abbot, "that perhaps you should tell us your story from the beginning."

"Well Lord Abbot, Baron Nigel, friends all—it was like this. I went, for a while, into the old croft, beyond the little brook, and—"

"And *why*," broke in Brother Godfrey, "did you go there? And at seven of an evening?"

"To—to look for mushrooms," faltered the old man.

"*Mushrooms!* In the evening? And in such dry weather?" said Brother Godfrey derisively.

"Well, Father, you see, down by the water, there are sometimes a few—and, if no one had picked them that morning, why, they would still be there in the evening." There was a slight titter from the villagers. "And as I looked, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud and fire unfolded itself." The Abbot raised his eyebrows at this.

Brother Godfrey frowned skeptically. "No one else," he remarked,

"has told of a whirlwind. I should—"

"It was a very small whirlwind," the old man said hurriedly, "I don't think you'd have noticed it, if you were indoors. Well, it came rushing towards me, through the sky, and, when it got closer, I saw that in it was the Wheel—and there were four faces around the edges of it."

"You say you *saw* the faces?" Brother Godfrey asked. "What were they like?"

"I could only see their eyes, Father, which blazed with light, and they sparkled like the color of burnished brass."

"He got that part straight out of the Vulgate." Brother Godfrey said, in an aside to the Abbot and Baron Nigel. The latter felt he ought to say something.

"Well, after all," Baron Nigel said reasonably, "if it really *was* Ezekiel's Wheel, it's to be expected it would look like the one in the Vulgate. Anyway, Peter can't read Latin, I'm sure."

"That's true, Baron Nigel," said old Peter. "I cannot read at all, but it is that way in the Scripture, as the Father says."

"May one inquire," Brother Godfrey said, "how you know that?"

"You told me once, Father."

"All right." Baron Nigel said, "Let's get on with it." The story was really rather interesting.

"Then the Wheel settled quietly down upon the ground," went on

the old man, "and hardly bended the bracken. But the willows that grow by the water's edge seemed to draw themselves towards the marvelous Wheel, and I felt myself drawn thither. Then, when the cloud had gone away, a door of silver opened in the side of the Wheel, and the cherubs came forth from it."

"Well, *that* certainly isn't in the Vulgate!" Brother Godfrey said. "Did they have wings?"

"Not that I could see, Father. But they were small, like children, and there was a shining light about their heads."

"Halos?" the Abbot inquired politely.

"That's what I thought they were, Lord Abbot, at the time. But they held in their hands flashing lights, which they turned this way and that. It was dusk, and the brightness of the lights blinded me so that I could scarcely see the cherubs."

"Then how do you know they were cherubs?" said Brother Godfrey.

"Because they were small, and they came out of the Wheel."

"That is a circular argument, and ridiculous. A little understanding of Aristotle would improve your logic. Proceed," Brother Godfrey said loftily.

"Then they spoke to one another in the tongue of the angels."

"Which, no doubt, *you* recognised." Brother Godfrey intoned,

"How do you know it was not Latin?"

"Why, Father, being cherubs, they would not be talking Latin. I report what I heard and saw, to the best of my ability—a truly wondrous vision . . ."

"It's a truly wondrous story, at all events," said Brother Godfrey.

"I believe it to be the truth," said the old man with dignity.

"I believe it *not* to be," said Brother Godfrey, "and that is a transgression on your part, even if you really thought it was true. Thou shalt not transgress in word or in deed, it is written, but also not in thought. That's even more important."

"But a man cannot help his thoughts, Father."

"There you go again!" said Brother Godfrey angrily, "Neither can a babe help dying before baptism, but it goes to Limbo for all that."

"It seems very unjust, Father."

"You must not, Peter," said the Abbot, "question the justice of Heaven. For myself, I would say that there are certain thoughts you must not have, whether you can help them or not—like pride, or a feeling of superiority over foreigners. Well, most foreigners—I except the Welch. Go on about the cherubs."

The old man cleared his throat. "My Lord Abbot, Baron Nigel, friends all . . . as I beheld the wondrous Wheel and the blessed

cherubs that came out of it, my eyes became accustomed to the lights, and I came a little closer. Then I saw, with wonder, their faces within the brightness that was about their heads, and each face was like unto a strange beast, and was the color of myrtle and green like the leaves."

"Green?" interrupted Brother Godfrey disapprovingly, "A most heretical color! And just what sort of strange beast did these faces of theirs resemble?"

"Well, Father—to tell the truth, like nothing so much as a grasshopper." The old man looked apologetically at Baron Nigel, who, he found, was regarding him with the greatest of interest. "And their limbs," he went on nervously, "their limbs were as the limbs of babes in swaddling clothes—thick and without form, two below and four above, and, in one hand, was held the light and, in another, was a wand."

Peter stopped and the rest waited in silence. "Was this not a sign?" he went on, with a look of beseeching at the head of the trestle-board, "Was this not a mark of favor on a humble man, when none have seen a like wonder since holy Ezekiel?"

"Six limbs—" began Brother Godfrey, but the Abbot raised a hand.

"Perhaps the extra pair were the wings," he suggested.

"But, Lord Abbot, you sound as

though you believed him!" Brother Godfrey sounded incredulous.

"He tells a very consistant story," said the Abbot, "Go on, Peter."

"Well, Lord Abbot," the old man said, "it was then, through the open doorway into the Wheel, that I beheld the other Wheel—the Wheel within the Wheel—and the little Wheel was on a stick, and set at an inclination. And within was still another cherub, who sat before the inner Wheel, which he grasped with his hands. Even as I marveled at this, I drew closer and crouched myself behind a rock.

"It was then that the nearest of the cherubs saw me and cried out with a loud voice to the others, and they all saw me, and they turned their bright lights upon me, and I was afraid. They pointed their wands towards me, and fire came from the wands, and I put my head down behind the rock."

Brother Godfrey rose to his feet and pounded on the board. "My Lord Abbot, this is fabrication! It is *not* in Scripture, and is at best the wanderings of a disordered mind—and at worst, which I suspect, the concoction of an evil one, one that would put into disrepute this village and ourselves.

"I shall ask of Brother Simeon, here, that he write down the names of all who come as witness for this—this liar and heretic!" He nodded to the eager young novice, who at once began to scan the people op-

posite, and to dip his quill into an inkhorn.

"Tell me," went on Brother Godfrey, with an unpleasant smile at Peter, "are you subject to fits—or have you ever been?"

The Abbot opened his eyes again, and beckoned to Brother Godfrey with a gesture of his head. Brother Godfrey bent to him and listened.

Nigel caught the phrase, "The sainthood, Godfrey, the *sainthood* . . ." But that was all he could hear.

Brother Godfrey sat down with a frown, and shrugged. He turned and shook his head at the novice, who stopped writing, and sat glumly with pale hands folded in lap.

"Go on, please," said the Abbot to the old man.

"Well, Lord Abbot, the rock split asunder in two pieces, and the bracken caught fire. The cherubs ran back to the Wheel and went into it, and the silver doors closed behind them. Then as I peered fearfully between the crevice in the rock, the Wheel arose into the air, and went back toward the north. I ran away." The old man stopped and looked at the hollow transparent bowl that he held in his hands.

"And if one is permitted to ask," asked Brother Godfrey, with a sideways look at the Abbot, "What is that object? In what possible way is it evidence to support your truly wondrous discourse?"

"This I picked," the old man said, "the next morning from amongst the shriveled bracken. It fell from the head of one of the cherubs as he went into the Wheel. It was one of the brightnesses that they wore about their heads. I offer it to the Church as evidence of what I saw." He handed it to the Abbot, "I give it to you, my Lord Abbot, since you are more fitting than I to possess so Heavenly a relic. I am an old man—and I should like to be a saint before I die."

A little later, Baron Nigel and the Abbot were examining the bowl.

"I wonder what it can be meant for?" said Nigel. "What did you think of his story, Abbot?"

The Abbot shrugged. "To tell you the truth, I think he did see something, but as to the sainthood—well, I'm most certainly not going to tell the Bishop about that. The Bishop, bye the bye, *is* subject to fits. This is very fine glass," he said, holding up the bowl to the light. "Quite without bubble or flaw. Probably Flemish—they make such things."

"What *can* it be, though?" asked Nigel.

"I have no idea. I shall keep my dwarf carp in it." said the Abbot.



LESTER DEL REY'S NEW NOVEL NEXT ISSUE

A Tale of Terror at Night in the City by

MANN RUBIN

*Everyone in the whole world was in on the secret
but me. So why won't any of you tell me where you
went or what you were doing, or why, during . . .*

THE THREE HOURS YOU LEFT ME ALL ALONE



I AM SEEKING someone who will tell me the truth about Sunday evening, March 29th, between the hours of eight and eleven P.M. I have been searching for the truth for a long time, but, so far,

I have gotten an assortment of lies, jeers and weak evasions, even from those closest to me.

I know you remember the facts, and I demand to know why you won't tell them to me. That was

© 1957, by Mann Rubin

the night it happened, that was the night you all disappeared from the earth. I want to know where you went and what you did. I don't like being left out of things.

I remember I was doing some free-lance work for an advertising agency. During the afternoon, I completed the outline, and then, toward the early evening, I settled down to the actual typing. At six o'clock, I stopped and had supper with my mother and sister. We did the dishes, and, afterward, they left to see a movie around the corner.

I like being alone. It gives me a feeling of potency, of separation. I listened to the radio for a while, but the programs were insipid, and I went back to the typing. I resumed about seven o'clock and played around with the campaign for another hour, before my eyes got tired. And then, suddenly, I knew. It was as if a thousand noiseless doors were shutting in my face and leaving me locked out.

The first thing I did was to get up and stretch and listen to the strange silence. My room was the same—the picture of Roosevelt hanging on the wall, the blue carpet beneath my feet, the table lamp, the books. Everything was the same, except for the quiet. That was alien.

My window overlooks a court, on all sides of which are buildings similar to the one I live in. I

have lived in this court for many years, and have reached the point where I know my neighbors, without being familiar with them as individuals. In this way I have developed a kinship toward them.

We are all friends. We pay the same rent, we breathe the same air. In our daydreams, when we look out on the court for escape, we have only one another to turn to. On Sunday nights, most of them remain at home, and their apartments are alive with lights.

I went to my window to see the bright apartments, but they were gone. I opened my window wider and stuck my head out into the night, listening, waiting for them to reappear. But there was nothing; no sound, no motion, no movement—only the lights shining through the windows and making shadows on the pavement below.

Remembering the baby in the next apartment that cried upon the slightest provocation, I shouted, "*Hello!*" into the night. I waited expectantly, but nothing answered, and I became more aware of the vast pervasive loneliness that surrounded me.

Moving into the living room, I switched on the radio again. Usually, the warming-up operation took only a few moments, but now the set stayed without articulate sound. The tubes hummed, and the green electric

eye was winking, but there was nothing else.

I went out into the hall and rang the bell of my nearest neighbors. They are a young couple, with a baby girl and a set of chimes that give off a fine tonal quality when the bell is rung. I listened three times to the chimes, and it was like the opening notes of a Tchaikovsky Concerto. But nobody answered.

I knew they were home, for I had seen their lights, and, earlier in the evening, I had heard the mother scolding the little girl. Sometimes, they kept their key under their mat, and, when I fished for it, I found it. I had already prepared a semblance of an excuse, in case they were at home. But, as soon as I opened the door, I knew no apology was necessary, for the rooms were deserted.

In their living room, a television set was on, but all it pictured was a series of lines that ran back and forth across the screen. I went to it and tried changing stations, but each one I tuned to showed similar patterns of jumping lines. On a nearby table, a cigarette was slowly burning in an ashtray, and a glass of sherry rested on a napkin.

I wandered into the bedroom and found the little girl's crib, warm and slept in and empty. Everything about the apartment indicated life, and yet my neigh-

bors had vanished. Going toward the bathroom, I heard the sound of running water, and, upon further investigation, discovered a shower running full force, but with no one beneath its copious spray. The situation was becoming more and more improbable and still there seemed to be no plausible explanation.

Returning to their living room I spotted a phone and attempted to dial the number of a girl I was sure was at home. When I received no answer, I tried the operator. The dull buzzing sound repeated itself for a minute, and then, when I couldn't take it anymore, I put the receiver back on the stand.

Out in the hall, I started ringing the bell of every apartment on the floor. Over and over, like a kid on Hallowe'en, I ran around, pushing buttons, waiting for the first familiar sounds of acknowledgment that never came. I was alone. I thought of all the lonely things I had ever seen, like mountaintops and leaves floating in water, and the sky after a rain.

I thought of loneliness and tragedy, and then I remembered my mother and sister at the movies and felt better. They would never leave me, under any circumstances. They belonged to me—they existed as supplemental figures in my world. Desertion was impossible.

I came back to my apartment and washed my face in cold water, trying to collect my thoughts. Everything was so inconceivable, so utterly fantastic. I got into a coat, lit a cigarette and descended, in the self-service elevator, to the street. The night was cold with a soft wind, and I breathed deep, in an effort to clear my mind.

I searched the darkness for some evidence of activity, but no motion caught my eye. The streets were barren. In the gutter, cars were standing empty, the lights of the street casting a glow across their still motors. I passed a candy store all lit up for Sunday night's business, but there wasn't a soul anywhere. I kept on walking toward the movie theatre, knowing that it was there I would find the answer to everything. I reached the bright marquee, but my relief was short-lived.

The box-office was deserted, and nobody was at the door collecting tickets. Inside, a technicolor picture played on the screen, but every seat in the place was empty. I ran up and down the aisles, shouting for my mother. I ran to the balcony and then to the projection booth, but everywhere was the emptiness, and I began to shiver.

I got out into the street again, still shaking. The night was so cold and so black, and the moon was so silvery pale. Suddenly, I realized that only I was seeing

the moon, that only I was gazing at the dark buildings that arched into the night, that only I heard the silence of the bare, abandoned streets.

I began yelling, "Anybody here—anybody here?" Again and again, I screamed the question at the empty night, but it was as if my voice had never known a listener, and nothing answered me.

I reached an intersection at Fourteenth Street and got a clear view across town. Nothing stirred. Every building, every vehicle, every object along the street was magnified in its isolation. Walking up Fourteenth Street I passed stores and theatres and houses, all signifying nothing.

At Third Avenue, an empty string of buses stood in the middle of the street. At Fifth Avenue, a gleaming, imported limousine, drawn up to a curb was the one reminder of a civilization gone. At Sixth Avenue, I went into a bar, and got behind the counter and had two brandies and some pretzels. I sat there a long time, gazing into my reflected image in the back-bar mirror, trying to find some solution.

I had always wanted to own something completely, like a philosophy or a woman, but to be sole possessor of a world was beyond all comprehension. Always, I had striven to maintain my individuality, but never to the extent that I wanted other people

completely out of the picture. Yet, they were gone. I had another brandy, but the pretzels were stale, and, after a few sips, I left.

It was a half-hour later when I returned to my house. I strolled around the apartment, not thinking, just smoking and staring into space. It seemed suddenly as if this vacuum, this void, this emptiness, had always been a part of my life, that this was but the first time I had been made to recognize the physical absence of people.

I sat down at my desk and attempted to absorb myself in the campaign again, but it was futile, and I was too conscious of the hushed calmness that emphasized my solitude. I opened a book and thumbed through it, consoled in the knowledge that I would have much time to read in the future.

I closed my eyes and rested my head on the desk, and waited. I thought about loneliness again, and the lines running across the television screen, and both seemed to be infinite and encircling. I became restless, and I stretched and saw that my watch read eleven o'clock.

Then you were back. The radio, which I had left on, started

blaring a melody so loud that I had to rush over and tune it lower. I went to the window, and there were my neighbors, veiled by curtains, moving, warm and cozy, about their homes. I watched for a long time, and, when I was sure they would remain, I went out into the hallway and replaced the key under my neighbor's mat.

Five minutes later, my mother and sister came home, and their faces were red and cold. I asked them how they enjoyed the picture, and my sister said it was fine and went on to describe it in detail. I listened. I asked them if they went anywhere after the picture, and they both looked at me in surprise.

It was then that I knew they would never tell me the truth. And that's how it has been with the rest of you. You smile and call me crazy, and deny everything when I confront you. All of you continue to keep the secret.

Why won't you *tell* me? Why wasn't *I* invited? Where did you *go*? I know the facts—I know you left me. Tell me where you went and what you did. Can't you understand? I don't like being left out of things. I always feel so cheated . . .

THE SCIENCE FICTION COLLECTOR

Timely information about Time, Space and other worlds in the newest book offerings, with items of interest to the SF collector.

by **SAM MOSKOWITZ**



IN SEARCH OF WONDER by Damon Knight. Advent: Publishers, 3508 N. Sheffield, Chicago. 180 pages. \$4.00 . . . A collection of book reviews in hard cover is almost a publisher's novelty and a volume composed entirely of reviews dealing with science fiction is enough to cause the lifting of more than one literary eyebrow. The author of the present volume, Damon Knight, was a special award winner at the 14th World Science Fiction Convention, where he was acclaimed the best science fiction book reviewer of the past year.

Knight's reviews are unusual in the science fiction sphere, inasmuch as they are a reversion back

to the old school of *destructive* criticism. Knight's observations are caustic, merciless and lengthy. He virtually flays the authors under scrutiny with whiplike turns of phrase and invective. Because it is only human to enjoy the thought of the obvious discomfiture Knight's candor must be causing, and because he stays right with his subject, his reviews are for the most part interesting and entertaining.

Be that as it may, Knight, as a critic, is afflicted with some very serious blind spots. First, he is apparently style-deaf. He attributes the shaping of Ray Bradbury's

All books, special publications and science fiction news items indicated for review in this new column should be addressed to Sam Moskowitz, Science Fiction Collector, 127 Shephard Avenue, Newark 12, N. J.

style to Robert Nathan, Christopher Morley and J. D. Salinger, when a simple comparison reveals that two completely obvious influences, Thomas Wolfe and Ernest Hemingway, wielded the greatest impact on Bradbury. So profound was Wolfe's effect, that Bradbury brought him back from the dead in a memorable story titled "Forever and the Earth."

Secondly, Knight seems under a compulsion to keep harrying an author simply because he has once severely criticised him. A good example is the chapter on A. E. Van Vogt, where Knight tosses that very gifted author into the literary junk pile on the basis, primarily, of one novel, calling him "a pygmy who has learned to operate an overgrown typewriter." He does not seem to understand that a writer should be judged by his best, and not by his worst work.

Then, in at least two places in the book, we are confronted with the absurdity of the author considering the original phrasing of his reviews so sacrosanct that no alteration can be countenanced in the text even though he lists numerous errors in his footnotes.

The bulk of the reviews in this volume were originally published in fan magazines, hence most of them should be new to the general reader.

An excellent introduction by Anthony Boucher effectively rescues Knight's book from any dan-

ger of the critics taking it too literally as a *definitive* critique of the modern science fiction and fantasy story.

E PLURIBUS UNICORN by Theodore Sturgeon. Ballantine Books, N. Y. 211 pages. \$35 . . . Sturgeon's place as a true literary artist in the field of science fiction seems to be well established and needs no further confirmation. That his skill is equally superlative in straight fantasy and even in non-fantasy is adequately confirmed in this Ballantine reissue of Sturgeon's "off-trail" stories.

Whatever story you may choose to sample in this volume, you will find the unusual, the off-trail, the completely different in several fictional categories told with magnificent adroitness.

Many of these stories were written during the period when Philip José Farmer with his unusual story "The Lovers" had broken down the sterner taboos on the use of sex in science fiction and fantasy. Therefore, we find Sturgeon taking full advantage of this freedom and utilizing erotic themes quite often, such as "The Silken Swift," which is based on the ancient belief that only a virgin may catch a unicorn; "The World Well Lost," a tale of two loving humanoids from another world, thought at first to be male and female, but who turn out to be alien versions of homosexuals; or

the unhappy affliction of Kellet in the western story "Scars," to list but three.

Here, too, you will find Sturgeon's prize-winning short-story "Bianca's Hands," which was rejected by every American fantasy magazine and then won a \$2,000 prize from Consolidated Press in London.

There is a grand total of thirteen stories, no two of them remotely similar in theme or treatment.

The volume has an introduction by Groff Conklin and a bibliography of Sturgeon's books and anthology appearances.

BEYOND THIRTY by Edgar Rice Burroughs. Publisher unknown. 57 pages, mimeographed. \$3.00.

THE MAN-EATER by Edgar Rice Burroughs. Publisher unknown. 50 pages, mimeographed. \$3.00.

EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS BIBLIO by Bradford M. Day. Science-Fiction & Fantasy Publications, 127-01 116th Ave., So. Ozone Park 20, N. Y. 28 pages, mimeographed. \$.50.

"Llana of Gathol" was Edgar Rice Burroughs' last published book. In it he returned to the locale of his first popular success, "Under the Moons of Mars," and to the character John Carter of Mars.

Writing in the foreword, Edgar Rice Burroughs details his final meeting with John Carter, who

tells him: "After you are dead, *and it will not be long now*, I shall have no Earthly ties—no reason to return to the scenes of my former life." The words proved extremely prophetic. No further book of John Carter ever appeared and two years later—March 19, 1950—Edgar Rice Burroughs died.

During his life, Edgar Rice Burroughs achieved fabulous popularity and riches. His books sold more than thirty-five million copies. His royalties and share of moving picture and comic strip rights are said to have netted in excess of ten million dollars and continue to supplement the income of his heirs. From the standpoint of sales and earnings this made Burroughs undoubtedly the most successful author in the history of the world.

Since a great part of his output was in a general sense science fiction, fantasy or scientific adventure, his most enthusiastic followers have always come from the ranks of science fiction readers, many of whom, including your reviewer, collect him avidly. Assembling a library of his fifty-eight published books is not too difficult. The real test comes when one attempts to locate and procure his stories which have never appeared in hard cover. His most sought-after work was the short novel "Beyond Thirty," which appeared complete in the February, 1916 issue of Street and Smith's

short-lived *All-Around Magazine*.

This story, written during the first world war, visualized the Western hemisphere as so cut off from the Eastern hemisphere that for 200 years no man of the Americas could visit Europe or Asia. But a young American finds himself accidentally blown across the 30th parallel and arrives in Europe and Asia for a rousing, typically Burroughish round of adventures.

The rarest item, however, was a work which Burroughs referred to as "Ben, King of Beasts." For years, no trace of this novel could be located, until the Rev. Darell S. Richardson tracked it down masquerading under the title of "The Man-Eater." It was a Tarzan-type story and had appeared as a serial novel in the *New York Evening World*, Nov. 15 to Nov. 20, 1915.

Now some unknown collector has published both of these short novels in mimeographed form, with flexible stiff covers and printed titles. Several copies turned up at the recent New York SF convention. It is a strange experience to review publications without being able to stipulate where they may be obtained and who published them, but the fabulous rarity of these two works makes it mandatory for your reviewer to inform collectors that reprints do exist. Each story is about 30,000 words long.

As part of the continuing interest in Burroughs, Bradford M. Day has edited and published a complete bibliography of his books and magazine stories with partial listings of his newspaper appearances, comic strips, big-little and big-big books, foreign editions and biographical notes. This can be readily attained from the publisher by Burroughs enthusiasts.

FLATLAND by Edwin A. Abbott. Dover Publications, Inc., N. Y. 103 pages. \$1.00 . . . The theme of other dimensions has been all too infrequently seen in science fiction of late. But twenty-five years ago it was almost as staple a region for exploration as outer space.

The fourth dimension, of course, was always the most popular. We know what the standard three are, length, breadth and thickness, but what, precisely, is the fourth? Is it Time as Einstein says? Does a fourth dimensional world co-exist simultaneously with our own?

Bob Olsen, a gifted science fiction writer who died recently, won wide acclaim for a series of stories based on the concept of the fourth dimension as a physical extension of the known three, using it for parking autos, pitching baseballs, printing newspapers, and even surgical operations.

Murray Leinster, who has often been called the dean of science

fiction, audaciously fared forth into the fifth dimension with his extremely popular tale, "Fifth Dimensional Catapult."

However, the framework of ideas which few science fiction writers dare to tackle was the concept of a *two* dimensional world. Not many stories have appeared in the science fiction magazines on that theme. One notable exception comes to mind. Wallace West wrote an entertaining story of a two dimensional *planet* inhabited by two dimensional people called the "Planet Plane," which was widely praised.

The real classic of two-dimensional science fiction, however, is Abbott's "Flatland," published originally in Boston in 1885. Virtually every story of the second dimension has drawn from the ideas in this little gem. It was formerly a great collector's rarity, but it has now been reissued by Dover in a popular priced edition.

THE COMPLETE BOOK OF SPACE TRAVEL by Albro Gaul, illustrated by Virgil Finlay and including an album of historical space travel art prepared by Sam Moskowitz. The World Publishing Co., Cleveland: 160 pages, \$4.95 . . . Patterned in format after the best-selling *Conquest of Space* by Chesley Bonestell and Willy Ley, this book, textually, is intended to ap-

peal to youngsters between the ages of 10 and 16. Because the technical and astronomical material is related simply, the book undoubtedly will be read with interest by children and teen-agers in these brackets.

Beyond that, it has considerable appeal to the adult science fiction fan and collector—most particularly because it has nineteen superb black-and-white line drawings by one of the acknowledged masters of science fiction and fantasy illustrating, Virgil Finlay. Forever plagued by the cheap pulp paper which minimized his careful line and stipple, Finlay has at last been accorded the respectability of good reproduction, and he does himself proud. The variety of techniques and the selection of subject matter reveal that Finlay achieves the fineness and flavor of true artistry without sacrificing any of the flexibility of a professional illustrator.

As an added bonus, the publishers have added *A Portfolio of Early Space Ships 1638-1929*, compiled by your reviewer from obscure and rare books, dime novels, magazines, newspapers and catalogues. Presented chronologically, the pictures and captions present the historical saga of fictional ideas on the designs and propulsion of space ships from earliest times to recent days.

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THE END OF ETERNITY by Isaac Asimov. For description, please see other side. Pub. ed. \$2.95.

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